Defend the Homeland
is a duty
of all Nicaraguan
LET'S PARTICIPATE IN OUR
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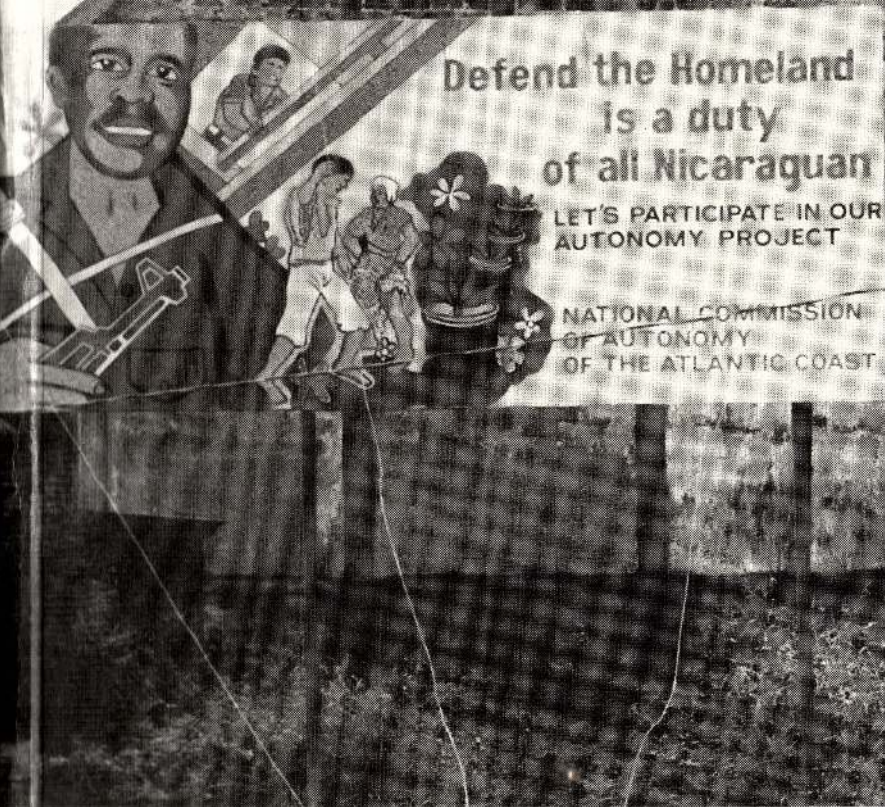NATIONAL COMMISSION
OF AUTONOMY
OF THE ATLANTIC COAST

Nicaragua: the revolution and the ethnic question

Aboriginal struggle
Amerindian resistance
Workers in the heart of the beast
Latinos in US unions
Labour party and policing

CONTRIBUTIONS

RACE & CLASS

A JOURNAL FOR BLACK AND THIRD WORLD LIBERATION

ALISON ROOPER and HAZEL SMITH

From nationalism to autonomy: the ethnic question in the Nicaraguan revolution*

Nicaragua, though predominantly Mestizo, contains several small nationalities, and one of the more intractable problems facing the Sandinistas is how to reconcile unity of purpose and a common goal with the aspirations for self-determination that the revolution has engendered among its various peoples – and all this in the context of American intervention.

'Six years of revolution with their limitations, contradictions and errors have taught us', declared Tomas Borge, a founding member of the FSLN, recently, 'that the first thing we must acknowledge is that an ethnic issue exists on the Atlantic Coast. That is, there are indigenous people and communities, with their own identities and differences among themselves and with the rest of the country, that are demanding respect and consideration. They need to be able to develop their languages, traditions, religious customs and their cultures. They demand a material base for development and better living conditions as well as genuine equality with the rest of the nation'.[1]

A history of division

But the roots of the Atlantic coast issue lie far back, beyond the atrocities of Somoza's dictatorship and the machinations of US imperialism, in the differential impact of Spanish colonialism in the west of the country, and British colonialism in the east. And this, in turn, was influenced by the particularities of Nicaragua's geography and topography. For Nicaragua, placed at the narrow neck of Central America, is part of the land mass that separates the Atlantic ocean in the east from the Pacific in the west. The chain of mountains that runs nearly all the way down its length divides the fertile, volcanic soil of the Pacific region, with its alternating wet and dry season, from the huge inaccessible tropical rain forests of the Atlantic Coast. It is a division that has had, and continues to have, far-reaching consequences, as Ray Hooker* has evocatively, and with purposeful precision, analysed:

> The Pacific has been made fertile by the activity of the volcanoes. After the acidity of the volcanoes is washed out by the rains, then what's left is very fertile – the Pacific lands are among the most fertile of the world – they compare with the black soils of Russia or the plains of Kansas in the USA.
>
> The soils of the Atlantic are not fertile. They are not good for the cultivation of traditional types of crops, something we must understand because it has lots to do with any project of transformation – any revolutionary project. The soils of the Pacific are very good for cultivation of things like rice, beans, cotton, tobacco. The soils of the Atlantic are not good for this. On the Pacific you find two distinct seasons – a dry and a rainy season, normally six months of each. On the Atlantic it rains every month of the year. Only in March and April do you have less rain. What does this mean? This constant rainfall leaches the soil of the Atlantic: essential minerals for the growth of plants are washed out and deposited along the coasts of the region. This is one of the reasons why marine life is so abundant on the Atlantic. And it's one of the main sources of wealth and food supplies for the people of the region.
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> Because the soil is leached of these essential minerals and because of the continuous rainfall, crops such as rice, beans, tobacco and cotton are not grown on the Atlantic. What grows well are permanent crops. But these have a drawback: coconuts, African palm, breadfruit, rubber, need around six to eight years before they enter into production. That means you have to have lots of capital to really

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transform the Atlantic Coast. Without huge amounts of capital no transformation can take place. It means that there's a time factor – a period of 8-10 years in which the people will feel very little progress. And this is one of the huge drawbacks to any revolutionary process on the Atlantic Coast.

Another resource of the Atlantic Coast is forestry. Forestry requires 30-40 years for trees to enter into production. In that respect the Atlantic Coast is also very rich. Certain species of trees that need 200 years to reach maturity in places like Switzerland, Canada, USSR, Finland – similar species reach the same level of growth in 30 years on the Atlantic Coast. Tropical rain forests include some 60% of all the animal and plant species in the world. And they are found in a very limited area of the world. But practically no investigation has been done. So there is tremendous unknown wealth, sources of medicine, sources of food to be developed from tropical rain forests.[2]

Hence, from the first incursions of colonialism, the two regions have been subjected to very different methods of exploitation which have, in turn, shaped different histories and different social and cultural patterns.

The Spanish, in 1502, were the first to reach the Atlantic Coast, which was then principally inhabited by three groups of Indians – the Miskitos, Sumus and Ramas* – but they did not find there the wealth they sought. So they transferred to the Pacific Coast where, it is estimated, they had within five decades virtually exterminated the estimated one million Indian population – shipping off many thousands to work the gold mines in Peru and elsewhere. As the Spanish moved from the Atlantic Coast, in their wake came the buccaneers and pirates – plunderers of the plunderers – who needed good havens on the coast from which to overhaul their ships and carry on their operations. Good relations were established between them and the Indians, particularly the Miskitos who proved most open to foreign contacts. As Ray Hooker explained, 'When you look at the strategy of survival of the Miskitos and of the Sumu, you notice two different patterns. The Sumu withdrew into the most inaccessible parts of the country, avoiding all contact. The Miskitos' complete openness proved to be a much more

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* In Ray Hooker's words: 'the Miskitos lived both in Honduras and in parts of north east Nicaragua. The Sumus occupied the greatest extension of territory of the Atlantic Coast at the time of the European arrival. The Ramas occupied the remaining areas. These people were basically nomadic. Their technological level was more or less identical. Their instruments of war and productive instruments were derived from plant fibres or from stone. There was a kind of ecological equilibrium in this area. No group could dominate or establish hegemony over the other group.' The Miskitos are today the most numerous of the indigenous groups – some 67,000 in 1981, compared to an estimated 7,000 for the Sumus and around 700 for the Ramas.

successful strategy. Both the Miskitos and the pirates had needs which the other could satisfy. The Miskitos, skilled hunters and fishermen (and fighters), could supply the pirates with ample food. In exchange, they got iron implements, learnt more advanced techniques of boat building and came into contact with different patterns of warfare. The Miskitos would often join in the pirate raids of the Spanish settlements on the Pacific Coast.

After the Spanish came the British, who formally established themselves on the Atlantic Coast from the 1630s onwards. Their interest in the region was to secure a strategic vantage point on the mainland from which to harry the Spanish, curb Spanish sea-power and maintain control over the lucrative slave and sugar trades. The British deliberately decided to establish peaceful and friendly relations with the Indians, as is evident from the records of their first colony in the region (Providence, an island off the Atlantic Coast), in order to use the Indians, as the pirates had done before them, to raid the Spanish settlements. (Often, as many as half an attack force was Miskito.) The depredations of the Spanish on the Pacific Coast, news of which was passed from group to group and was known to the communities of the east, made the British task that much easier, so that British control of the Atlantic Coast could well take the form of indirect rule – through Miskito 'kings', who had a certain limited power of self-government. Remembrance of this 'autonomy' was to prove important in later years.

Thus, from the onset of colonialism, major differences were being created between the two regions. In the Pacific, the few Indians who escaped starvation, massacre or expulsion as slaves at the hands of the Spanish were absorbed, culturally and linguistically, into a Spanish-speaking, Catholic population, into which was instilled contempt towards the 'uncivilised' Indians in the British-controlled region of the east. (Today, some 90 per cent of the Nicaraguan population are of this Mestizo origin.) On the Atlantic Coast, by comparison, there was little British settlement – neither the terrain nor the climate being hospitable to colonial ventures – but numbers of escaped or shipwrecked African slaves established themselves there – some made their way across from the Pacific Coast, some escaped from Jamaica and other Caribbean islands, some were brought in as slaves by the settlers.* And since they originated from different parts of Africa, they appropriated and adapted the master's language to their own uses. As Ray Hooker put it:

> The black people had to learn a language to communicate. They learned English. They got as close to the master as possible. So,

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* Their descendants, the Creoles, today form a small but distinct grouping on the Atlantic Coast, living mostly in the two ports of Bluefields and Puerto Cabezas and dependent mainly on the fishing industry. There are an estimated 26,000 Creoles.

because they got closer to the master, for example than the Miskito, this developed certain antagonisms between Creoles [the ex-slaves and their offspring] and Miskitos. The Creoles began to look down on the Miskitos as inferior. The Creoles acquired a lot of the contempt which the British held for the Indian. When you read the public pronouncements of the British government at that time, they would say about the Miskitos that the people of the Atlantic Coast have lived in freedom and have governed themselves for centuries. But in private correspondence, they are referred to as savages incapable of self-government, drunkards, monkeys, etc. So obviously, this contempt was transmitted to the blacks who, because of language, were closer to the British.

The difficulty of physical communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts – even today there is only one road linking the east to the west – made it easier to maintain the hostility and the sharp cultural and linguistic divides between the two regions.

In 1821, Spanish colonial rule came to an end in Central America without it having developed any sound economic base, either in mining or in agriculture, in the Pacific region of Nicaragua. The British attempted to supercede the Spanish, but were themselves forced to yield before the power of the United States, which laid claim to Central America as solely its concern and sought to impose indirect control over the region.[3] British claims to the Atlantic Coast were finally defeated at the end of the nineteenth century when José Santos Zelaya, the new, Liberal president of Nicaragua, occupied the main port town of Bluefields and took political and military control of the coast. He removed the right of self-government which the British had conferred on the Miskitos and imposed 'Spanish as the official language of the region – thus giving fresh impetus to the historical legacy of hatred they felt for the 'Spanish'.

This animosity was further compounded by the different religious and cultural experiences of the two regions. For while the Pacific was predominantly Catholic, it was the Moravian church* that began to make incursions into the life of the people on the Atlantic Coast. The influence of its schools and mission stations was enormous. The Moravians were the first to write down the Miskito language: they helped introduce a certain cultural uniformity among the disparate, nomadic Indian communities, and they encouraged permanent settlement in villages. In the complete absence of any other social or welfare institutions, the pastors – traditionally often the only literate figures in the village – took on the functions of social workers and political leaders.

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* The headquarters of the Moravian church has, from the early twentieth century, been based in the US.

In the Creole community, too, the Moravian church came to have an important influence. Most Creoles are Moravians, and the Moravian schools were, again, the main educational institution. Less positive, however, was the hostility the missionaries projected towards Catholicism which served to reinforce the mistrust of the Spanish that the British had engendered on the Atlantic Coast.

Exploitation

The economic exploitation of Nicaragua really began to take off in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the fertile and more densely populated Pacific Coast region, small-scale subsistence farmers were dispossessed to make way for large-scale, lucrative coffee plantations. Although the US controlled the market for coffee, the actual estates were under the control of a local bourgeoisie who maintained their position at the cost of intense brutal repression of the dispossessed peasantry. Mounting resistance to this culminated in Sandino's revolt of 1927, Nicaragua's first anti-imperialist uprising, which was put down with the help of US marines, and followed by almost fifty years of dictatorship under the Somoza dynasty.

By contrast, in the east   which had never historically suffered the same intensity of direct physical repression as the west – control was exerted in purely economic terms. It was a resource not for development, but simply to be laid waste, stripped and despoiled. US and Canadian companies were granted concessions to the timber, mineral and marine resources. Areas were deforested, mines were opened, and Indians, dispossessed of their land, forced into wage labour. 'The people of the Coast had to sit there and see them take all our gold. What we did was to go down into the hole, dig the gold and end up with silicosis',[4] is how Yolande Campbell, a representative of the regional government of South Zelaya (one of the Atlantic Coast provinces) put it.

Under Somoza, these processes intensified:

> Three centuries of exposure to British mercantilism had facilitated Miskito receptivity to US exploitation. Traditional subsistence agriculture, turtling, fishing or hunting gave way to a preference for canned goods bought at the company commissaries. With each retreat, workers returned to their old ways with less willingness: satisfying cash requirements by selling surplus rice, cassava, fish or turtle to the communities that still had a wage labour force, or to the port and mining towns. Land agreements were abrogated by the Managua government and thus the historic distrust of the 'Spanish' on the Pacific Coast continued under the influence of US imperialism as it had developed under English colonialism.[5]

Foreign companies were allowed to virtually exterminate the natural

resources of the region. Mining and forestry companies, for example, operated round the clock, day in day out, with no holidays. And Somoza's economic control over the region was virtually complete. He owned all the best land in the area, all government jobs were in his gift. Hand in glove with the foreign mine-owners, he sent in the National Guard when the miners went on strike. He owned most of the fishing companies in the region and the only sugar-producing company. Those he did not own, he worked in partnership with. 'If you didn't cooperate with the system, you couldn't get a job', said Ray Hooker. 'You could survive as a subsistence fisherman, at a level where you could get enough to eat, but that's about all.' He went on:

> The Atlantic Coast people did not participate whatsoever in the political life of the country. They were second-class citizens. Now practically all Nicaraguans were second-class citizens, but it was much more accentuated on the Atlantic. You see, the Atlantic Coast was a colony of a colony, because to a great extent the Pacific was a colony of the USA. We on the Atlantic were a colony of the Pacific – not a very pleasant situation to be in.

In this way, Somoza, either directly or indirectly through US capital, but always in economic terms, exercised dictatorial control over the Atlantic Coast. And it was extremely effective – so absolute that obvious, direct force was largely unnecessary. Thus, whereas in the Pacific region constant intervention by Somoza's private army, the National Guard, was necessary to suppress peasant discontent at the loss of their land to coffee and cotton estates, in the Atlantic region there was only sporadic organised resistance to exploitation by foreign companies, and the National Guard kept a low profile. There were only 20 National Guard in Bluefields when the Sandinistas took over in 1979.

Ironically, despite the extent of their economic exploitation, Coast people associated foreign companies with money and higher living standards. 'People didn't feel exploited because the companies respected communal life. They were only interested in exploiting national resources. People were happy to have work and get American goods', according to Thomas Gordon, head of the regional government of South Zelaya.[6] What people did not understand, in Ray Hooker's words, was 'how their own resources, their own future was being ravished ... for them, this period in which their own future was being destroyed was one which they considered a time of abundance. It's one of the tragedies of the situation. The people of the Northern Atlantic Coast could not see all the forests being wiped out. They had jobs, they had American beer, booze, clothing, etc. – a time of wealth.'

The promise of the revolution

Some 50,000 people – out of a population of less than three million – died in the two years before the FSLN, after years of preparation hidden away in the mountains, emerged at the head of the final mass uprisings against Somoza, in mid-1979. Hundreds of thousands more had suffered torture and persecution throughout the Somoza period. The revolution was widely welcomed along the Atlantic Coast – though because of the differential nature of the exploitation visited on that region, it was one in which the mass of Atlantic Coast people actively participated only towards the end.

In 1979, a small group of Atlantic Coast intellectuals who had been studying in Managua during the 1970s made contact with the San-dinista organisations and succeeded in forming a small armed force with back-up in the local population. A young Creole student, Eustace Wilshir, led a large demonstration in Bluefields, capital of South Zelaya, to mark the first anniversary, in January 1979, of the assassina-tion of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro by Somoza. The crowd shouted San-dinista slogans, as the National Guard moved in to arrest the leaders of the demonstration. Wilshir was beaten up, tortured and imprisoned for a month.

By June of that year, there were around 350 people in the Bluefields area under arms, many of them young Creole men. Under the direction of Sandinista columns, they took control of the Somoza-owned fishing company, before seeing the National Guard off their posts, largely without a shot being fired. In Puerto Cabezas, the capital of North Zelaya, a similar process took place. The foreign mine-owners fled in May, taking with them the geological surveys of the mines. Workers im-mediately formed trade unions and drew up demands for better condi-tions. In both towns, people came on to the streets to celebrate the San-dinista victory. They formed volunteer committees and set to work to clean up the neighbourhoods, build concrete pavements, improve sanitation and provide some basic health education. The most signifi-cant effect of the revolution was that it gave birth to a huge wave of hope and optimism that Somoza's legacy of underdevelopment and marginalisation would be ended.

From the very start, the FSLN made a specific commitment to the peoples of the Atlantic Coast, which was outlined in their 1969 manifesto:

> The Sandinista Popular Revolution will put into practice a special plan favouring the Atlantic coast, submerged in the worst abandon-ment, in order to bring it into the life of the nation.
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> A It will end the vicious exploitation that the Atlantic Coast has suf-fered throughout its history by the foreign monopolies, particularly

by Yankee imperialism.

B It will prepare lands of the zone deemed apt for the development of agriculture and cattle.

C It will take advantage of favourable conditions for the development of fishing and forestry.

D It will stimulate the flowering of local cultural values of the region, growing out of the original aspects of its historical tradition.

E It will do away with the hateful discrimination to which the Miskitos, Sumus, Sambos and Negroes of this region have been subject.*[7]

Encouraged by the Sandinistas' own statements, indigenous organisations which had made abortive attempts to negotiate with Somoza during the 1970s were hauled back into life. In November 1979, the Alliance for Progress of Miskito and Sumu Indians (Alpromisu) organised a mass meeting of some 700 traditional village headmen with Daniel Ortega, the head of the Junta. it was agreed to form a new organisation, Misurasata – 'Miskitos, Sumus, Ramas and Sandinistas working together' – to work for the improvement of conditions. Misurasata was given a seat on the Council of State, and was empowered to act almost as a fledgling government on the Coast. It collaborated with the Sandinistas in organising defence committees and local militias, in running the literacy crusade in the indigenous languages (initially, this was conducted in Spanish) as well as in running sports and cultural activities. In a very real sense, it was the potential suddenly opened out by the revolution itself that was to foster the subsequent demands for autonomy and control of the region.

Meanwhile, the new Sandinista government began a programme of vigorous economic development of the Coast. The Sandinistas had inherited an economy which was in a shambles. The last of the foreign companies had pulled out leaving factories and machinery in disrepair, no spare parts and very few technicians and administrators to aid in the reconstruction of the region. In the first four years of the revolution over $10m was invested in the infrastructure. A mobile health service took a consistent health care programme into the remotest parts for the first time. A new hospital was built in Bluefields. Rural schools brought education to the most isolated villagers. The first road was built connecting the Coast to the west, construction of a new deep water port began, and major projects to cultivate African palm and coconuts were initiated. All foreign-owned multinational companies operating on the Coast, together with the Somoza-owned fish processing industries were nationalised.

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* By 1979, this terminology was consciously changed to read Miskitos, Sumus, Ramas, Blacks.

But what the FSLN were certainly not aware of, and which they learnt by bitter experience, was the necessity to understand the complexities of the history and be sensitive to the aspirations of the indigenous Indian and Creole people of the Coast, who initially identified more closely with the British and US colonialist and imperialist heritage, rather than the young 'Spanish' Sandinista fighters from the Pacific.

The failings of the revolution

Within a few months of the revolution, relations between sections of the indigenous communities and the Sandinistas had begun to sour. In the Creole population, which is concentrated around Bluefields, there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the revolution, but anti-Sandinista propaganda began to find a sympathetic ear amongst certain sections of it. The Creole community has close contacts with the US as well as with the rest of the Caribbean – between 1952 and 1982 some 75 per cent of Creole graduates left the Coast, many to find jobs in the US. And the Atlantic Coast, it should be remembered, is surrounded with US-run radio stations which have, from the very first, bombarded the region night and day with propaganda and disinformation. The ardour of the small group of young Sandinista supporters in control of the town, and their commanders from the Pacific, began to rub up sections of the traditional Creole community the wrong way. Their initial actions, in closing down the ten brothels of this sleazy town, busting a den of local thieves, and stopping the import of marijuana, were not universally popular. Eustace Wilshir, regional FSLN official, admitted that 'there was no time to consolidate the political lessons among the people: we acted too fast and made ourselves unpopular'.[8]

But far more serious were the problems which emerged in 1981 over the issue of Cuban teachers. While the US-backed radio stations continued to broadcast a barrage of propaganda that the Cubans were coming to take over, that the revolution was burning and destroying churches, a so-called 'Creole Movement for Independence', created with the help of a reactionary trade union federation (Confederacion de Unidad Sindical), convinced the older generation of Creoles that the import of Cuban teachers was a threat to their traditional Moravian values. It was seen as part of the creeping introduction of godless communism – anathema to all that they most deeply believed in. And so, the annual celebration held in San Jeronimo, in September, was converted into a demonstration against the introduction of Cuban teachers, and for the release of a detained Peruvian journalist. A policeman was beaten up. Within ten minutes, the 'Voice of America' radio station was broadcasting a bulletin that 'Sandinista police opened fire in Bluefields, killing twenty ... '. The Sandinistas, fearful of an organised, US-backed conspiracy, immediately sent the army in to

arrest the seven leaders of the demonstration and detain twenty other Creole men. Most of the seven subsequently joined the counter-revolution. The mishandling of those detained is now admitted freely to have been a serious mistake.

'People were beaten up, and soldiers referred to the demonstrators as monkeys, black gorillas – that type of racial slur', said Ray Hooker. 'People still remember this ... In all of Latin America there is racial discrimination. In all the areas where Europeans have had a tremendous amount of influence you find vestiges, remnants of it, and you still find that in our country. It's something which is being eradicated little by little. You can't do it overnight. But you have to be honest and accept that it was there, it's still there and it's something which we have to get rid of.'

Though this proved an isolated incident, and relations slowly improved, the introduction of compulsory military service throughout Nicaragua at the end of 1983 was the focus of a new wave of discontent among Creoles. The war had not directly disrupted life in Bluefields and there was no great enthusiasm for taking up arms to fight the Contras – some of whom were from Creole families. Many young men left Nicaragua to avoid military conscription and to try to make a new life elsewhere. Many Creoles, although they are willing to give the Sandinistas a chance, do not see the revolution as their revolution. Others are sceptical of the Sandinistas' condemnation of US imperialism. Economic difficulties caused by the US blockade and the war are often interpreted as proof that the Sandinistas are no good, the absence of consumer goods being taken as proof of their inefficiency. Nonetheless, the Creole community is not a homogenous organised group and many, especially from the younger generation, have participated enthusiastically in the revolution and are increasingly continuing to do so. In the elections to the National Assembly in November 1984, Ray Hooker, the local Sandinista candidate, himself a Creole, polled an impressive two-thirds of the vote.

The problems with the Indian community, however, have proved far more serious. What the Sandinistas did not and, owing to the historical divisions that had grown up, perhaps could not, easily grasp was the impact of the liberation on a people who had always felt ethnically oppressed by 'the Spanish' from the west. And, on the other hand, the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the Atlantic Coast people for the revolution and the new mass organisations they were being encouraged to form, tended to reinforce the stereotypes that Spanish-speaking Sandinistas had towards people of a different colour and a different language. The Sandinistas were slow to recognise their own racism. 'We were educated within the ideological framework of rancher and coffee and cotton harvesters who taught us that Nicaraguans descend from Spaniards and that some Indians still needed to be civilised', explained

Tomas Borge, Nicaragua's Minister of the Interior, adding that 'people felt ashamed of having black or Indian blood. It was like being part of a race of demons.'[9]

The first rift came over complaints that the Sandinistas were indifferent to the cultural needs of the Miskitos – specifically, demands that literacy classes be held in the native languages rather than the official Spanish. But discontent came to a head over the government's agrarian reform programme, which envisaged the development of new agro-forestry and fishing enterprises so as to integrate the resources and labour force of the Atlantic Coast into the national economy. A conservation programme and the establishment of a large reserve of virgin forest land was proposed under the plan. Misurasata interpreted the project as a preemption and a rejection of Miskito land claims – which they were then submitting to the government – and responded by claiming 33 per cent of national territory as theirs, (including the gold mines) and demanding five seats (instead of one) on the Council of State, a place in the revolutionary junta (the ruling 'cabinet') and regional autonomy verging on political independence.

Fearing the beginning of a secessionist movement controlled by foreign interests, the Sandinistas (who had made the revolution on a platform of national self-determination and independence from US domination) responded quickly. On 20 February 1981, soldiers broke up the ceremony commemorating the end of the literacy crusade held in a church in Prinzapolka. In the ensuing scuffles, four Miskitos and four soldiers were killed. A number of Misurasata leaders were arrested, and a group of them, including Steadman Fagoth, later fled to neighbouring Honduras and joined ex-national guardsmen of Somoza who were forming the anti-Sandinista Contras.

Relations continued to deteriorate between the government and the indigenous communities despite the work that continued on renovating and building up the region's infrastructure. A declaration of principles from the FSLN in August 1981, reaffirming the unity of the Nicaraguan nation and the Nicaraguan people's control of natural resources and guaranteeing 'the property of the lands where the communities of the Atlantic Coast have lived whether in communal form or as cooperatives',[10] was not well received by Miskito leaders.

Armed attacks from the Contras over the border in Honduras steadily increased, as did the barrage of anti-Sandinista propaganda, forcing the Sandinistas to prioritise defence. In this context, mutual political suspicion began to take root. To the young Sandinista soldiers who were sent to the Coast from the Pacific, many of whom had lost relatives in the war of liberation, US imperialism was the arch enemy. To the people they were 'defending', the powerful US was the purveyor of material wealth and a consumer culture. What was more, they did not want to be told what to think by groups of Spanish-speaking, gun-toting

youngsters. A vicious circle was settling in, in which the Miskitos became suspicious of every Sandinista policy, including their economic reforms, while many Sandinista soldiers, mostly young and inexperienced recruits from the west and lacking historical understanding, began to equate being Miskito with being Contra. Hostility was interpreted as evidence of counter-revolutionary sympathy.

Towards the end of 1981, and following two months of continuous attacks in the area, former Misurasata leader Steadman Fagoth, who had formed his own Contra group, began broadcasting from Honduras claims that aerial bombardment of Miskito villages was imminent, while the Honduran Defence Minister went on the air to declare that the Nicaraguan army had been responsible for massacring some 200 refugees. The aim, it was understood, was to foment insurrection in the area, wrest it from FSLN control, and declare it a 'liberated' zone. In response to the crisis, the Sandinistas forcibly relocated several thousand Miskito villagers from their traditional homes and lands in the war zone near the Rio Coco to a new settlement of Tasba Pri fifty miles south. Their homes and crops were burnt behind them, presumably to prevent them from being used as a base for the Contra.

'If you had left the Miskitos there,' Ray Hooker explained, 'you'd have had to be shooting at them − that is shooting at the Contras attacking from Honduras and the Miskitos would have been in between ... Perhaps they should have been given a choice and told: "You can stay in your villages along the coast, but you would be taking your lives in your own hands. And if you remain probably many of you are going to be killed." Whatever decision was taken ... our government would have been accused of callousness. It was a very difficult thing. Any resettlement programme is difficult. It was not carried out with physical violence but psychologically it was violent.'

The story of the relocations was distorted out of all recognition until it became a story of 'genocide' against the Indians, and was used by Reagan in Congress to justify large scale US support for arms and supplies to the counter-revolution. The Sandinistas, endorsed by a number of international investigations, were able to refute such claims. But the policy, intended as a military measure to weaken the influence of the counter-revolution and generate a new loyalty amongst the Miskitos, did precisely the opposite. Despite the social facilities made available at their new settlements at Tasba Pri, the move was never understood by the Miskito villagers and served to deepen the rift that already existed.

Many Miskitos responded to the forced relocation by fleeing north into Honduras. This divided not just families but the Miskito people themselves. Between 20,000 and 22,000 Miskitos have lived ever since in the UN-run camps in Honduras where they have provided a recruiting ground for the Contra group, Misura, many being recruited by force.[11] To those who originally fled were added others who left their homes at

the behest of, or after persuasion from, Indian Contra groups. Some went voluntarily, others were forcibly abducted and taken to Honduras at gun point. Fabricated stories of massacres, of communist totalitarianism, of religious persecution, served to intensify their fear and make the Contras' work easier. Most of the rumours were discovered on close examination to have no basis in truth, but a few did. During the arrest of Miskito leaders in December 1981, for instance, up to seventeen Miskitos were said to have been killed in the mining town of Leimus. Some of those declared dead were later produced alive and well — though not all — but the soldiers responsible for the killings that did occur were, according to Sandinista officials, punished and are serving sentences. This was the only case of murder of unarmed Miskitos that was found by the Inter American Commission of Human Rights.[12] One other case — the murder of seven young Miskitos at Walpa Siksa by a Sandinista soldier in 1982 — led to the summary execution of the soldier by his commanding officer.

'It is undeniable that a number of indigenous communities in conflict areas, particularly those in the North, have experienced a spectrum of brutalities', concluded CIDCA, the independent research Institute for the Atlantic Coast, based in Managua, which carried out detailed investigations. 'At one end of this spectrum is personal and cultural disrespect — a function of historic racism. At the other end are inexcusable crimes committed in the physically and psychologically difficult context of a defensive war in hostile and unfamiliar terrain.'[13]

America turns the screw

Since 1982, the Sandinista government has succeeded in putting a stop to such incidents. But the damage had been done. 'For the Miskito', complained a Miskito leader, 'the revolution has meant separation of the family, forced moves away from his birthplace and ID cards'.[14]

The situation was one which the US had, from the first, attempted to exploit, though opinions vary amongst Sandinistas as to the extent of its ethnic manipulation. Luis Carrion, deputy interior minister responsible for the Atlantic Coast, detected the hand of the CIA from very early on.

> The enemies of the revolution intervened in the situation to create a crisis. They exacerbated the separatist sectors inside Misurasata to sharpen contradictions. It became part of a counter revolutionary plan. If in 1980 they demanded the right to communal land, in 1981 they wanted the right to all the land of the Atlantic Coast.[15]

The mistake of the Sandinistas, said Carrion, was the weakness of their security organisation and their naivety in allowing the leaders of Misurasata to be the exclusive mediators between the government and the population of the Coast.

For Sandinista Miskito leader Mary Bushey, a member of the executive of Misatan (set up in July 1984 as an indigenous group to work within the revolution), the problem originated in the social composition of the leaders of Misurasata and their lack of accountability as an educated elite to the people they were representing. 'The CIA got interested in Misurasata when they had started to become a fledgling government in the region. Some of the leaders were conscious pawns of the CIA. Other members did not realise.'[16]

Whether the CIA manipulated a separatist demand into Misurasata's programme or whether this arose 'naturally' is perhaps an academic question. If they were not involved before the arrests of Miskito leaders, then they were certainly quick to exploit the bad relations afterwards. Former Misurasata leader Steadman Fagoth, who set up his own Contra group Misura, was broadcasting on a CIA-financed Contra radio station from Honduras by September 1981, and by December Miskitos were being given military training on CIA budgets and sent back to destabilise and destroy all projects associated with the Sandinistas and to kill pro-Sandinista individuals.

For Ray Hooker, the US role was pivotal. 'Just as the British used the Miskitos to kill the Spanish, to destroy Spanish settlements, Spanish towns, now the US is using some of the Miskito population and other people of the Atlantic Coast too, to do its dirty work. They have absolutely no interest in the region as such.' Hooker, who along with others, was kidnapped by a Contra group (and subsequently released in an exchange of prisoners), offered some insight into what motivated his captors.

> They are misguided. Many are in it for the money. 90 per cent were Miskitos from the area. They have a powerful machine-gun, lots of ammunition, 3,000 cordobas per month – equivalent to between 7-9,000 now – three meals per day, good uniforms, good boots. And they do not risk their lives. In the 58 days I was there, they never attacked any of our soldiers. Because it's usually the defenceless schoolteacher who is attacked ... You see they are not fighting for principles ... a number of them approached me about turning themselves in ... they wanted to go home. Some felt that it's impossible for a tiny country like Nicaragua to defy the United States ... They felt, for example, that the government was going to be overthrown before the elections. They can't carry out a prolonged war, but as long as the Reagan administration is willing to throw away that amount of money you will always have some people who go in for three months, abandon it, return to their communities, then when they need some more money, they'll go back in again. Without US support, the counter-revolution would not exist.

The training of these people, and thousands like them, including

those press-ganged at gun point, is presented by Reagan as support for 'freedom fighters' laying down their lives to fight communist oppression. And Contra insurgents have virtually paralysed the Atlantic Coast region, sabotaging the whole government effort to modernise and improve the infrastructure. Refugees from war-torn villages have flocked into Bluefields and Puerto Cabezas. Schools and health centres have had to close, development projects have been abandoned or curtailed. Coast people who worked with the Sandinistas have become the target for Contra attacks and kidnappings. An attack on the Miskito resettlement at Sumubila in April 1984, which destroyed the hospital, a warehouse and a community house, and killed six civilians, is one of countless such attacks. By 1985, Nicaragua was spending nearly 50 per cent of its budget on defence.

The way ahead

Since 1982, the government has attempted a number of initiatives to improve relations with the peoples of the Atlantic Coast, replacing government officials in the region with local people, and pressing on with the expansion of education particularly. Ray Hooker is aware of the difficulties:

> Step by step we're taking control over the administration of our region. There are less people from the Pacific on the Atlantic Coast than there were before. And the aim and the goal is that it is people from the Atlantic Coast who administer and plan the development of the region. But there are so few trained people. This is a big handicap.

And there have been other moves. At the end of 1983, an amnesty was declared for Miskito prisoners; and in 1985, a general amnesty was declared for those who had fought with the Contra, in order to encourage Miskitos in Honduras to return.

But by far the boldest, most far-reaching and hopeful of all these initiatives has been the radical rethinking the government has done on the question of autonomy for the inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast. Five years ago the demand for autonomy set alarm bells ringing in the new revolutionary junta and convinced the Sandinistas they were dealing with a counter-revolutionary plot to undermine the new Nicaragua. The demand that then resulted in the rounding up and imprisonment of Miskito leaders is now official policy of the FSLN, approved by the National Assembly. In Tomas Borge's words:

> We want this autonomy project to be an archetype, a bright light that will wipe out racial discrimination, cruelty and misguided policies toward ethnic groups. We hope this project will begin a contagious

healing process, spearheading the search for solutions to indigenous problems on this continent.[17]

At the end of 1984, in the wake of a number of attempts to negotiate with the Misura and Misurasata* Contra groups, the Sandinistas pledged autonomy to the ethnic grou₁ s of the Atlantic Coast. As an expression of confidence in the Miskitos, the Sandinistas announced that Miskitos relocated in the resettlement camps of Tasba Pri would be allowed to return to their traditional lands in the Rio Coco in July 1985. The offer brought rejoicing to the Miskitos, though the practical problems of returning to communities which no longer exist, and under conditions of war, are enormous. The Contras have sabotaged the return by destroying the only bridge to the area, and their constant attacks have impeded rebuilding and relief work. Many Miskitos have, as a result, strengthened their support of the Sandinistas.

As a preliminary, regional autonomy commissions were formed in the northern and southern provinces, representing the ethnic balance of each province. A consultation document which took nine months to prepare, entitled 'Principles and Policies for the exercise of the Right to Autonomy by the Indigenous People and Communities of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua', was published in the five main languages of the Coast. What followed was an unparalleled level of consultation, which was just, as at December 1985, drawing to a close. House to house consultation took place involving, as near as possible, every household in the region. Hundreds of volunteers were trained in special workshops in order that they could systematically consult with the people. In addition, dozens of seminars with community and ethnic groups were held throughout the region – fishermen, students, teachers, young people, the outlying communities, all were consulted. In the Miskito community, the document has been discussed in both government controlled and non-government controlled areas.**

The different ethnic groups consulted raised a variety of demands. The question of what proportion of the Atlantic Coast's wealth should be retained locally has been hotly debated. In the Creole community, there is agreement that it should be more than half. The right of the autonomous government to develop traditional commercial and trade links with Afro-Caribbean countries, particularly Jamaica, was

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* The name had been taken over by one of Misurasata's former leaders who set up a Contra group.

** The results of this massive exercise in participatory democracy will be synthesised by CIDCA, and it is hoped that 1986, despite the increasing destabilisation of the Nicaraguan economy, will see the promulgation of the Statute of Autonomy for the Atlantic Coast. The promise of autonomy has become an essential preresquisite for the ending of military hostilities on the Coast, though it is difficult to see how the promise can be fulfilled while the war continues to drain resources.[18]

claimed. From the Miskitos came a reiteration of concerns already taken up in the basic document (return to their native lands, recognition of their culture and language), but also a demand for assistance in economic development.

'They say they are living almost completely on state charity, that the government even gives them free food. Whatever the reason, it humiliates them. Their communities ask that instead of subsidising them, the government provide them with some means of production', said Mary Bushey. Fish hooks was the demand of one coastal community, a bus was another, teachers for a school, paper or pencils. 'The truth is that it would take very little in most cases to resolve the problems of our communities. I think there's still a lot of work to be done in raising the consciousness of the administrators on the Pacific Coast', she concluded.[19]

Common to all the groups was a desire to be excluded from compulsory military service orders applicable to the Pacific region. 'We are but a small nation (some 7,000 people)', said Sumu Indian Timoteo, 'and if our young people die in the war, we will disappear.'[20] The Creoles are in agreement. 'People say "we are ready to take on any amount of responsibility that is allotted to us"', explained Bluefields mayor, Creole Johnny Hodgson.[21] 'That doesn't mean they will accept impositions on the autonomous government. They think that the Ministry of Defense should not be able to demand that the regional authorities enforce the fulfillment of military service if the people are not in agreement with it.' Many young men have, in fact, left the Coast in an attempt to avoid conscription and, as a response, the Sandinistas have already relaxed the draft. So although the question of military unity might appear to be central to a revolutionary government, in practice the Sandinistas have had to accept the impossibility of forcing an unwilling population to take up arms.

For the Miskitos both in government and non-government areas, the question of the make-up of the army is crucial. Mary Bushey, of Misatan, which is currently mediating between the government and Miskito armed rebels said of their views on the autonomy proposals:

> Their main worry is which army will operate in the zone. They propose that government troops be made up by people from the region. Misura and Misurasata (made up of experienced combatants, familiar with the zone) would be willing to unite to form special contingents of the Nicaraguan army. They don't want to be under the control of arrogant officers from the Pacific.[22]

The consultation and contact with internal Miskito insurgents has already begun to bring benefits in the form of a tacit ceasefire between government troops and some armed Indian groups. As one of the Indian leaders of a section of the Contra group, Misura, put it:

If we are holding talks with the government, it's because we trust the revolution ... We took up arms to make the Sandinistas listen to us and the war will continue if they refuse to come to an understanding with us. They have to trust that the people know what is best for them and trust the leaders chosen by the people. They must let Miskitos join the revolution of our own free will, not by force.[23]

What has become apparent is that the movement for autonomy has come out of the logic of the revolution itself. It initially generated a massive surge of optimism that Somoza's legacy of immiseration would be ended. As it unfolded, it was precisely through its attempt to create a new anti-imperialist consciousness, engender a new national self-respect, pride and self-reliance, that it opened the door to the flowering of ethnic identity and self-affirmation:

We're going to have autonomous governments on the Atlantic Coast for the black population and for the Indian population: autonomous governments in which, for example, the black people will choose their own leaders, the Indian population will also do the same. The black population will be administering the natural resources in their region. Not only administering but also benefitting from ... call it profits, from the correct administration of these natural resources. And they are also going to have cultural responsibilities – responsibilities for the preservation of their culture.

For the first time we're going to be in a situation where the official policy of the national government is one of cultural preservation instead of cultural extinction. And this is important. We'll also have programmes of bi-lingual, bi-cultural education which will also enhance the culture and the identity of the different ethnic groups. What this means is that the Nicaraguan national identity will be enriched, enriched because it will no longer be one sided. When you think of Nicaragua you will no longer only think of a Pacific, Spanish-speaking mestizo. You'll have to think that a Nicaraguan can be black, he can be Miskito, he can be Sumu, he can be Rama ...

When the black people begin to exercise political power, economic power, comply with their cultural responsibilities, this exercise will, in itself, generate self-pride. And who has made it possible? The revolution, the Nicaraguan revolution.[24]

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MIKE COLE

The Aboriginal struggle: an interview with Helen Boyle*

As white Australia moves towards its bicentenary, there are no signs of rejoicing in Aboriginal communities. For, since the British invasion, Aboriginal people, in succession, have been subjected to wholesale massacres and disease, have been left to 'die out', and when this did not happen, have been inflicted with a policy of forced assimilation. Indigenous to the continent for over 50,000 years, they were not granted citizenship and the right to vote till 1967.

Currently, they represent about one per cent of the population, the majority living in the three sparsely populated states of Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia, while Sydney has the largest concentration of Blacks in Australia. On every index – health, mortality, employment, income, housing, education, welfare – they suffer appallingly in comparison to white Australians. They lead their lives segregated from the rest of society – in urban areas in pockets of the inner city, and in rural areas increasingly on their own traditional lands as well as on camps, missions and reserves.

One of the worst of such reserves is Palm Island, off the coast of Townsville, in Queensland. On Palm Island there are about 150 government houses for about 2,200 Aboriginals – up to thirty-seven people

might live in one house. The houses themselves are windowless and built of asbestos board. Those who can't get government houses live in the shanties. The black unemployment rate on the island is something like 87 per cent, and there are virtually no facilities, apart from the council-run beer canteen. The Queensland Education Department rules that the 315 daughters and sons of the islanders are taught nothing about Aboriginal culture at the state school. Palm Island was where the Queensland government sent those Aboriginals whom they regarded as a 'nuisance' on other reserves. Still others were relocated on Palm Island at the whim of mining companies who, in the 1960s, began to appropriate Aboriginal land.

Queensland is, in fact, notorious, as a state, for the racism and discrimination it practises against the Aboriginals. Up to the early 1980s, for example, under the Queensland and Torres Straits Islanders Act, the white managers of the reserves (state government appointees) had virtually unlimited powers. Blacks could be expelled at their discretion, they needed permission to receive visitors, they could be, and were, paid less than the legal minimum wage, they could be compelled to work as the reserve manager dictated; even their communication with the outside world could be vetted. (The only thing the Act did confer was some security of tenure over the reserves to the community as a whole.) The reserve manager was also entitled to authorise the operations of mining companies in the reserves, without consulting the inhabitants. There is still no community control over the use to which Aboriginal land may be put.

It is around the encroachments of the multinational mining companies, and the ways in which Aboriginal lands have been handed over to them, that much of the struggle of recent years has crystallised. As far back as 1837, a British House of Commons report declared that Aboriginal people have a 'plain and sacred right to their land'. Only since 1976, after years of struggle, was this right enshrined in law (the Land Rights Act) which granted ownership of existing reserves in the Northern Territory to traditional Aboriginal land-owning groups. Land councils were set up to administer the Act, but ownership of minerals under the soil was retained by the government, and mining has gone ahead. But even the minimal safeguards and rights afforded by the 1976 Act applied only to the Northern Territory. Land Rights Acts have subsequently been passed, piecemeal, for New South Wales, South Australia, and Maralinga (the site of British nuclear testing in the 1950s); they still do not exist in Queensland and Western Australia, where high-powered and expensive campaigns have been waged against the whole concept of land rights. And even where small gains over the issue of land rights have been made, at the cost of immense effort by the communities themselves, these are under constant and mounting threat from powerful vested interests.

In the following interview, Helen Boyle, a leading Aboriginal Rights activist, ranges over these and other issues.

Mike Cole: To what extent do you think Australia is a racist society and in what particular ways do you think this affects Aboriginal people?

Helen Boyle: From the European settlement, Australia's history has been based on the intentional, and at times unintentional, destruction of Aboriginal traditional society and Aboriginal culture, to the point where the traditional society that existed before white people came doesn't exist any more. There are just modifications of it. Australia's whole economy has been built up on the backs of Blacks. We have been massacred and used as slave labour, especially in the pastoral industries. Australia is a well developed country, and yet its indigenous people's life chances compare unfavourably with some Third World countries.

MC: Could you give some examples?

HB: Per head of population, Australian Aboriginals are the most highly institutionalised race of people in the world. For example, there is something like six times as many Aboriginals in prison as whites, yet we form only 1 per cent of the total population. Levels of trachoma are something like the third highest in the world. There's a very low life expectancy for Aboriginal people, the worst figures being in New South Wales where Aboriginal people's life expectancy is about 52 years – 20 years shorter than that of white people. This was recognised, I think, in the 1981 Census on Aboriginals when William Borrie recommended that the age for receiving an old age pension be dropped for Aboriginal people because we just weren't reaching pensionable age. Also, some of our ill-health figures are very high in terms of communicable diseases like gastro-enteritis and tuberculosis. Some illnesses that have been wiped out in other countries are still amongst the Aboriginal people.

MC: Would this be in the rural areas or urban areas, or both?

HB: It's right across the board, especially in terms of Aboriginal infant mortality. The figures are very high in New South Wales where quite a sizeable amount of people live in urban areas.

MC: What do you feel are the main ways that the racist nature of the society affects Aboriginal people in everyday life, in terms of on the streets, in the pubs, relationships with the police and so on?

HB: It's affecting them quite a lot in that, for example, as a Black woman walking down the street, you're constantly being pulled up by white men calling out to you asking for a fuck. I get into a taxi and I am a long way from home and I continually get taxi drivers putting the hard word on me, in exchange for a free ride in the cab, and as a woman travelling alone at night in a cab there *is* that fear of sexual attack on you.

MC: Is this because of some sort of racist and sexist stereotype of Aboriginal women?

HB: Yes, there is a stereotype of Aboriginal women: we're supposed to be good lovers. The worst one I came across was a French man who was a cab driver, and people have these images in their minds that French men are great lovers and Aboriginal women are great lovers, so I had to have this long discussion with him — and you're in that situation where sometimes you just have to get home because it's extremely late at night, and that is the only avenue open to you. Otherwise, you walk the street and then you probably get pack-raped. So what you do is you don't get off where you live. You get off two stops up the street and then still run the risk of getting raped from the two blocks to your actual house, but you don't want to let this taxi driver know where you live. All this, of course, places severe restrictions on our life. Our social life is restricted too, like not being served in hotels and night clubs. You know for a fact that if you want to go to a night club or something, you're not sure whether tonight they'll be in a good mood and allow you in.

MC: Is there no legislation which you can appeal to on grounds of discrimination if you are refused service in a pub or nightclub, or whatever?

HB: There's an anti-discrimination board which has been set up, but a lot of these things are just toothless, and it takes so long for a claim just to be heard. It's well documented that a majority of claims from the anti-discrimination board are from Aboriginal people. There was a big complaint in Mullewa, Western Australia, about discrimination against Aboriginals, but nothing was done about it. A year later, a young Aboriginal man got the life squeezed out of him by a publican who was an ex-cop — and then the media puts it down to alcoholism; it was alcohol that caused his death.

MC: What is the relationship between the Aboriginal people and the police?

HB: There is a long history of mistrust, and hatred of the cops, which goes back to the early twentieth century — particularly the 1920s and 1930s. Daisy Bates, a woman who used to live amongst Aboriginals, put forward the view that Aboriginals were dying out. This heralded the so-called 'protection era', when governments used to set up institutions to 'protect' Aboriginals. The idea was that they smoothed the plight of a dying race. So they gathered everybody up, put them into missions and reserves and gave them a bit of dignity in the last days of their lives. But there is also evidence to show that employers wanted cheap labour and you'll find that a lot of these missions were quite close to big pastoral stations. So that Blacks were used as slave labour there. In fact, there is a lot of legislation, that you can find records of, where Aboriginal people,

if they ran away from employment, would be brought back by the cops, and in some cases their feet would be burnt so they wouldn't run away. Around that period, the police were the legal guardians of Aboriginal people. They were the ones who dished out the blankets every year, they were the ones who dished out the rations, and they were the ones who decided whether you could get married to another Aboriginal person, since there were even rules and regulations saying who you could marry. We had to go to the local sergeant to get permission to marry. Cops had an extremely powerful role. They dominated all spheres of our lives. There were also the large punitive expeditions where massacres were carried out by the police, and the Black trackers.

MC: What exactly is a Black tracker?

HB: The Black trackers were a very much despised group of Aboriginal people, yet in some cases those people had no choice but to be a Black tracker. They were used extensively in all states by the police. Basically, they went around and used their tracking instincts to hunt out large groups and shoot them. Tribes would get slaughtered, and so Black trackers were regarded as traitors to Aboriginal people. The police have been responsible for massacring whole tribes of people; that sort of thing is still continued today.

MC: So what would you say is the current relationship between, say, the people in Redfern* and the police?

HB: Very bad. Every summer the police use us as practice for the young trainees of the 21st division. Every year you get the police going round causing a riot, the last one being at the Princeton Hotel. I happened to be in the middle of things that night because there was an Aboriginal band playing, one of the top Australian bands at that time, and the hotel was just packed out with Aboriginal people, and everyone was feeling very good about being there. Just before closing time, I left and as I walked from the hotel to the street where my car was parked, about eight vans pulled up. There were a lot of cops inside, and they started running out with their batons up in the air, hitting people on the head and whacking them around and putting them into the police wagons. My friend had been with me all the time, but she stayed behind in the hotel. When she put her head outside to see what all the commotion was, she got a baton smacked in her face. She lost two top teeth and the bottom teeth were forced through her bottom lip. She had to have stitches. There was another 16-year-old girl who was there who had a miscarriage, because she got whacked in the stomach with a baton. It was all provoked and instigated by the cops — some of the vans that

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*Aboriginal people in Sydney live predominantly in the inner-city suburb of Redfern.

were there had come from twenty miles away. They had a crown sergeant there, who is in charge of ten police stations, directing the whole thing, but none of them ever have their numbers on them, so you can never identify any of them. A lot of Aboriginal people were charged under the Intoxicated Persons Act. There were some Aboriginal women there who don't drink, who called the Aboriginal medical service doctor to take blood samples which, of course, came out negative. They were then threatened with charges of prostitution. So they had to accept the charge of being drunk. They were then locked up. Most of the people picked up were women, and they were sexually abused, in terms of the cops putting their hands up their dresses, and their batons up their dresses and that sort of thing, and feeling them when they did the searches. Then, not content with that, the police went to Redfern housing company and ran through there; people who were asleep in their beds were arrested and charged with causing a disturbance to the peace. They ran dogs through there as well, which were going around biting everybody. The relationship between cops and Blacks is very bad, not just in Redfern, but everywhere.

MC: Could we move on to the education system? To what extent do you believe that the existing education system reinforces racism and racist stereotypes of Aboriginal people? Do you think schools have a major role in reproducing racism?

HB: Yes, they certainly do. Schools promote the fallacy that Aboriginal kids are the dummies and are not good learners, when they're not aware of the social conditions that Aboriginal students come from. For example, middle ear diseases are very high amongst Aboriginal kids, so if a student can't hear a teacher, and the teacher gets frustrated because the kid's not listening, the teacher's assessment is that the kid is inattentive. Often, because of eye diseases, the student can't see the board and can't work at all, and unless teachers know these sorts of things and look for signs in a student, they're going to keep reinforcing the theory that Aboriginal students are less intelligent than white kids.

MC: What about the actual curriculum? In England I know that the Aboriginal people either appear as part of history – a people who were here 200 years ago – or as a type of timeless exotic oddity. There is no discussion of the real situation of the Aboriginal people in the 1980s. Is this the same in Australian schools?

HB: Very much so. For example, when I was at school, I was taught that Captain Cook discovered Australia, and my daughter has been taught the same thing. That is denying the Aboriginal people who have been here for something over 60,000 years. White people of Australia have only been here 200 years. It's denying that history. You even get that sort of thing still coming forward at university. When I was at university –

and I've been to two institutions, one in Perth, and one in New South Wales – there was a lot of emphasis on traditional Aboriginal society and on promoting the 'noble savage' image amongst the students. Very little emphasis is placed on the situation of modern Aboriginals. And that sort of thing is very upsetting to a lot of Aboriginal people *now* in that it is denying that they exist and denying that they have a culture.

MC: Do you think there are any ways of improving this system, or do you think there is a need to set up some kind of state-wide or nation-wide alternative run by Aboriginals for Aboriginals?

HB: The school system has a very bad record over providing appropriate education for Aboriginal students. If you are going to look at the education system, you have to tackle it at all levels – you can't just do it from one. There are different views amongst Aboriginal people about which is the best way to go. One view says that you provide alternative structures to the formal white education system; another says that you should develop an alternative, but also force the white education system to adapt and change and provide appropriate education for Aboriginal students. I favour the latter.

MC: Can we talk about the class structure? You were talking earlier about the connection between big business and the police, and the way the police were acting in a sense as agents for getting Aboriginals to do cheap labour. Where would you place Aboriginal people in the class structure of Australia in the 1980s?

HB: I'd say that Aboriginal people are now part of the working class. Before white people came here we had divisions in traditional society, divisions in the sense that you were initiated or not initiated. But nobody owned property. In terms of the classic marxist theory of owning property and the means of production, it was a pre-industrial society. But when whites first came here, we were forced into capitalist society, and introduced into the cash economy. And that has had a really devastating effect on traditional Aboriginal society. The whites did a good job of destroying a lot of traditional values, and they have now created a situation where a lot of Aboriginal people internalise a lot of white views.

MC: One thing I have understood since I've been in Australia is that Aboriginal people believe that people belong to the land, rather than the land belonging to the people. I also understand that there is a belief in cooperation rather than competition. So I wondered, if these are traditional values, whether they are in fact incompatible with the whole basis of capitalist society.

HB: The land belongs to the people and the people belong to the land. And that's how the Aboriginal people express it; it doesn't belong to one

person. You might have a guardian of a particular area, but that person is a custodian, and looks after it for the whole group. There is no price tag on the land.

MC: So a system based on the ownership of property and the ownership of land, which capitalism is, is the very opposite of traditional Aboriginal beliefs about people's relationship to the land?

HB: It's not a simple answer. Some Aboriginal groups feel that you shouldn't compete with other Aboriginal people and should keep to those traditional values – no competition, and everybody shares things. You'll hear a lot of Aboriginal people saying, 'we share things', 'we share what we've got'. But, at the same time, some internalise the views of the wider community, and *do* put themselves in positions where they look after number one. The thing to remember is that Aboriginal people have got a wide range of views, and they cover the whole political spectrum. That is something which not a lot of white people accept, or even think about. They still cling to the 'noble savage' image. They think that we're one homogenous group; we're not. Whites see Australia as one country divided into six states, and a couple of territories. Aboriginal people don't see it that way. The continent, which whites call Australia, is made up of many hundreds of countries. People in those countries are very different, in their social customs, in their way of living, to other people in other parts of the continent. We all have our own histories, so it's not a simple question. Generally speaking, though, a lot of Black people say yes, we share a lot of things and we do a lot of things together.

MC: Well, would you say there is a consensus amongst Aboriginal activists that they feel they are in some kind of class struggle as well as the struggle against racism, and that there is a need maybe to move towards some kind of socialist society rather than capitalist society?

HB: No, once again the views differ. There is a wide range of opinions. Some, like a lot of white people, think that communism is a dirty word, and if you dare mention communism or socialism they'll freak out, and come back with very reactionary stuff. Yet, in the same breath, they'll tell you that, while we don't want what you whites want, you whiteys want communism, we want what we used to have before you whites came – to share everything. If you say that you're a Black person with socialist views, you're still regarded with a lot of suspicion and are sometimes written off. There's a lot of Aboriginal people who argue that they're not part of the working class at all; they don't see that sort of thing in marxist terms of capitalists and working class. They say they don't want to be involved in any white man's politics.

MC: Presumably Aboriginal people can't go back to things the way they

were, given the nature of Australian society. How do you see the struggles ahead?

HB: As a socialist, I think it's important that Aboriginal people join up with all the progressive forces around to overthrow capitalism. I feel more strongly about that now, since I went to Cuba and I've seen how Blacks exist under Cuban society. I like what I saw. I saw an elimination of racism there. I saw how Black people had pride in their roots, something which hasn't happened in Australia. Here, you're still made to feel like you're an outsider, an alien in your own country. How the non-Black population in Cuba relates to the Black population is something which is totally a brand new experience for a Black person like me living in Australia. So I feel more strongly about channelling my energies into changing the sort of system that operates here in Australia where Black people are made to hate themselves, where we're forced to accept white people's views which deny our own existence.

MC: You were talking about the importance of aligning with other forces. What is the general situation in Australia between Aboriginal activists and the left, the women's movement, the peace movement and so on? Is there any sense of coming together? Or do you still feel that the Aboriginal struggle is somewhat isolated?

HB: In a lot of ways it's still isolated. For example, trade unions have a bad history of working with Aboriginal groups. In fact, they've been involved in campaigning against equal rights for Aboriginal people, such as equal wages. The Australian Labour Party has got a bad history as well. In fact, it was one of the main parties, or *the* party, that pushed the white Australia policy. On some occasions, when these forces have seen the links between what we're asking for and what they want, they will come together – for example, the Commonwealth games in Queensland in 1982.

MC: Can you tell me about that?

HB: At that time Aboriginal people were trying to make use of the international media to push our views about the need to smash the Queensland and Torres Straits Islanders Act. This state law, which has been looked at seriously by the South African government in its attempts to revamp Apartheid law, was created by the extreme right-wing Queensland state government of Joh Bjelke Peterson. It is used to control the lives of Aboriginal people on reserves and missions. The law can be used to ban Aboriginals (for example, political activists) from returning to their former homes. It has disenfranchised Blacks in local elections. Aboriginals in missions and on reserves can't vote in local elections! Also, it gives the right to the Queensland Minister for Aboriginal and Islander Affairs to dismiss the *elected* councils on the reserves. Up to the early 1970s, permission had to be obtained from the white mission

manager to open a savings account or to buy electrical equipment! Anyway, at the time of the Games, the same state government was introducing other repressive laws and making it into a police state, so groups really identified with that struggle. But, generally speaking, we've come to realise that we can't rely on them to come forward. In fact, the only way they have come forward is when we have begun to shout and get out on the streets ourselves. A classic example was when we began to set up community-based organisations like medical and legal services. We didn't wait around for progressive unions and those sorts of people to come and help us. We've done all of it ourselves. Even as regards the women's movement there are a lot of Aboriginal women who don't identify with it — though a lot of the things they talk about are very common to a lot of women, regardless of where they come from in the society. But racism is so sharp, a lot of Aboriginal women feel that they must work on that issue first, and that to start talking about women's rights means you're dividing Aboriginal men and women. We want to be together as a united front. There is a section in the women's movement that I've been on rallies with. They yell out, 'kill, kill, kill the men'. I freak out and make sure I walk away from where these particular women are, because we realise that, as Aboriginal people, we have to join with men to face the whole issue of racism in Australia. We can't be separating ourselves at this stage. At the same time, that's not to say that we Aboriginal women are conservative and don't think that we should be pushing our rights forward as Aboriginal women.

MC: There is a danger, in the establishment of a socialist society, that women still maintain a position as second-class citizens. Would you say that women have to play a central role in the struggle, in order to be equal afterwards?

HB: Yes, but Aboriginal women play a very dominant role in Aboriginal politics, at community levels, family levels and within Aboriginal political institutions. The majority of services are run by Aboriginal women; they just cover every sphere and therefore see a total view of things.

MC: What seems to unite Aboriginal people very much in the 1980s is the issue of land rights. Would you like to give your views on that? What do you see as the central features of the struggle for land rights, and why do you feel it's important?

HB: A lot of people say, 'What do we mean by land rights?' It's a common question and it's more than just asking for land. We are asking for our culture back, to be allowed to live the way we want to live. We're not asking for just a piece of it back. There is a lovely little wall mural in Redfern which says, 'we just don't want pieces of land, we want the whole pieces that belong to us.' This is a really good political statement.

We want land rights to improve our health standards. Land rights are the answer to the high prison population, and the low education levels. We want to carry out the programmes that we see as appropriate for us. It means getting our families back together. White people sort of scoff at it. They don't really see what Black people are talking about. And sometimes you can't put it down, you can't put it down in writing. I can remember recently I was out in a sheep station which some Aboriginal people have bought. A white film-maker asked me the same question: 'What do land rights mean?' And I couldn't answer. I told him to piss off. At that particular time I hadn't been home to Western Australia all year. My grandmother had recently died, and I could see these Aboriginal men and women who were on the property with me; just how they carried themselves, because they knew they'd bought that land, with dollars and cents; the land that was *theirs* back. But just the feeling of walking around, walking past the ex-owner, the white owner, driving past; couldn't care if he was a fly in the air. Just how proud those people were, just the way they carried themselves. And thinking of my grandmother, who had died, and I was quite close to her, and getting upset because I couldn't go home, because there was an air strike on. There was a lot of red dust there, on the property, and there was a lot of red dust at home, and I just wanted to feel it running through my fingers, just to smother myself in it, thinking my grandmother's part of it now. But I can't get to her, can't stand next to her grave and feel all that. And it was like I just felt a big hole in my life. She was dead, gone, and that was a link gone in my life, a link in the chain that spanned my mother, grandmother, mothers before them. And there's this man listening to me, but not comprehending it. He just wanted me to answer it academically, and you can't ... You can't. You can talk about it economically and politically, but spiritually you can't. You've got to have been through a lot of that pain that Aboriginal people have experienced to feel that sort of link – that denial of living out your laws. It's a totally different concept to how white people look at it.

MC: How do you see the future, and what would you like to see?

HB: I never read horoscopes. At this point in time, there is going to be an extra hard battle that Aboriginal people have to face again as the government prepares itself for the 1988 bicentenary and tries to present to the world an image that it's doing something for its indigenous people, when we know for a fact that a lot of our services are being cut. There is a lot of money being spent on the handing back of Uluru Rock* by the department of Aboriginal affairs, but what's not known is that the community that is living there now, at the base of the rock, has had a

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*This is the rock that whites call Ayers Rock.

severe cut in funds. The reason given is that there is no money available, yet there's something like 40,000 dollars just for a sausage sizzler.* It was a good PR job for the Australian government – it's not widely known that it is going to be renegotiable every five years. It's also the preferred national land rights model which the federal government is trying to ram down our throats. There's been wide protest against it by Aboriginal people throughout Australia. We also embarrassed them in the international arena at Geneva. The federal minister for Aboriginal affairs is now saying that he doesn't mind if states introduce their own legislation – this is a big backdown from the 1967 referenda where the federal government got control over states in dealing with Aboriginal affairs. But Aboriginal people right across Australia don't want the states to be given the right to govern Aboriginal affairs. For example, in Tasmania, the premier says that there are no Blacks there and he gets something like 20,000 dollars a year in grants from the federal government to have houses built for Blacks, and so on. In fact, he's on public record as saying that there are no Aboriginals in Tasmania. Take the situation in Queensland. There's been just so many demands by different Aboriginal communities that they want the federal government to intervene, and the federal government has continued to back down all the time. But it would be a *disaster* for Aboriginal people if the states were given the rights to Aboriginal affairs. Recently, the West Australian Labour party, which is in government, announced that it won't be pushing for land rights legislation if it wins again. So it's getting to a crucial stage where it's going to be a big *hard* fight. We have had lots of big hard fights over the last 200 years, but these attempts are trying to push us right back 50 years.

MC: To what extent do you have international links? Do you feel you can get support from sympathetic governments, sympathetic groups within countries?

HB: We've grown up a lot over the years. At the time of the Commonwealth Games in 1982, which we discussed earlier, some of us went to Africa, to lobby African nations not to come to Queensland, to boycott the Games. We assumed that black countries would help us out. But, of course, it's not as simple as that, and we were unsuccessful in stopping those nations from participating. We've set up information centres overseas and the one in London is particularly active. And we have been given speaking rights at the United Nations – some countries

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*This was how the anti-land rights governor of the Northern Territories described the barbecue and festivities accompanying the handing back of Uluru Rock to the Aboriginal people.

having given up their rights for us to speak. But I think we're getting to the stage where we can't rely on other progressive governments to come in and fight our battles. I think 1982 was a good lesson. We can *learn* from other people's experiences, but when things have to be changed, we have to do it ourselves. That's my view.

KHAMSIN No 12

The Gulf War

including papers given at a conference organised by
The Committee for the Defence of the Democratic Rights
of the Iranian People

Eqbal Ahmad *on the Iran-Iraq War*
Joe Stork *on Arms and the War in the Gulf*
also with papers presented by
M Ja'afar, R Keivan, A Ashtiani & M Arman,
and a review article by **Azar Tabari**

and an essay by **Adel Samara** on
Arab Nationalism & the Palestinian Question

JAN NEDERVEEN PIETERSE

Amerindian resistance: the gathering of the fires*

For Albert White, Mohawk brother

Wounded Knee, Wounded Knee
What a cold heart place to be
With your brothers and your sisters
lying broken on their mother
but their spirits cry in triumph
that this place where they lay dying
holds the seeds of new beginnings
Wounded Knee.

Eileen Evans, 1983

The encounter of Europeans and Indians on the American continent is not simply a story of haughty conquerors overwhelming dumbfounded savages; rather, it is a drama of the interpenetration of two histories involving many peoples, European and American. There were considerable differences, however, between the patterns of colonisation in North and South America: notably that the Spanish were mainly interested in gold and silver, and mining formed the basis of their colonial economy; while in the North, the main economic preoccupations were

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the fur trade and settler agriculture, and the plantation system in the southern part, as in the Caribbean and Brazil. Moreover, North America and the Caribbean became zones of European rivalry, so that in these areas two sets of factors interacted: competition between European national and mercantile interests, and antagonisms between Indian peoples.

From the 1590s, the United Provinces and England began to take their struggle against the Spanish-Habsburg Empire overseas in order to threaten its lifelines of colonial wealth, for it was New World bullion that was the source of Spain's finance for her military campaigns in Europe. The Dutch sought to stir up discontent among the indigenous peoples subjected by the Iberian powers, in Chile, in Peru, on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua and in Brazil, and engaged in 'counter-colonisation', endeavouring to create a rival commercial and colonial empire.[1] Such operations were more successful in Asia and Africa than in the Americas, and more so in North than in South America. These European battles fought on the world's seas and shores lasted through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, until a new pattern of global hegemony had been established.

European rivalries were also reflected in Indian-white relations; as Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz noted:

> Colonial regimes created complex phenomena in order to maintain footholds ... This was especially true in frontier areas of contact and competition over territory, often for strategic purposes to protect rich interior colonies, or due to their inability to overcome indigenous resistance. ... trade dependence ... was the lever used to create 'alliances' with Indian communities to hold the frontier against another colonial power.[2]

Thus, in the north-east the Iroquois sided with the British against the French and the Shawnee in the fur trade; the Comanches in the south-west allied themselves with the Spanish against the Navaho and the Apache; the Cherokee were at one time anti-French, then anti-English. Sometimes pro- and anti-white groups ran through one tribe, as with the Chocktaw, who were pro-English in the east and pro-French in the west. Among the Natchez, around 1700, there were pro-French and anti-French factions, divided according to one interpretation between classes, in this peculiarly class-stratified nation, with the Great Sun and the majority of the higher aristocracy siding with the French; although in 1729 the Natchez, almost in concert, attacked the French in New Orleans.

This period has been referred to as the 'manipulation period' in Indian-white relations.[3] However, to portray this as a relationship of manipulation by whites of Indians may be to overlook the other side of the relationship: the manipulation by Indians of alliances with Europeans

in order to settle rivalries with neighbouring peoples or, in some cases, between competing clans or factions. Here, divide-and-rule worked both ways, for a time. To overlook this dimension of divide-and-rule in reverse would be to deny the Indian peoples their sovereignty as actors in history. To a certain extent, the Europeans became participants in dynamics that had already been at work before they arrived. On the other hand, the Europeans also brought their conflicts to the new continent and this exerted a considerable influence upon the future intertribal relations. It is by viewing the Indian peoples not solely as victims of history, but also as its designers and participants, that a more realistic assessment – beyond the stage of moral indignation at the 'Indian plight' – is arrived at.

Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz argues that such alliances as that of the Miskitos and the Iroquois nations with the British against, respectively, the Spanish and the French were instances of 'indirect colonisation': 'the recruitment of certain geographically opportune groups as surrogates'.[4] But this portrayal of the Iroquois as merely an instrument in the hands of foreigners underrates their sovereignty – the sovereignty of a people who consider themselves as the Ongwhehonwhe, the Real People, who after thirty years of Iroquois wars controlled the entire region east of Lake Michigan and possibly the area extending from Carolina to Hudson Bay, a people whose political organisation, the League of the Iroquois, has been described by historians as 'the strongest and most formidable organisation in North America',[5] and whose principles of political organisation, admired by Benjamin Franklin, have influenced the formulation of the Constitution of the United States. To argue that the Iroquois and their wars against the Hurons, the French and the Susquehanna were merely instruments of the British, victims of 'indirect colonisation', is to rob the Iroquois nations of their dignity as a people.

George Hunt, the historian, who examined the Iroquois wars, attributed them to the strategic location of the Iroquois in relation to New France and the Huron trading empire, and their interest in acquiring and controlling the fur trade. Hunt may have underestimated the qualities of the Iroquois confederacy (whose role had been emphasised by Lewis Morgan), but at least at no point does he portray the Iroquois as 'British agents' – he portrays them instead as defending their own interests. Hunt's emphasis is on the importance to Indians of the European trade goods – 'English powder burned on the Mississippi a half century before the English cabins reached Lake Ontario, and the Ottawa tribe had fought a commercial war with the Winnebago of Wisconsin, forcing French trade goods upon them, ten years before the hesitant French settlement had reached Montreal.'[6]

This parallels the account given by the Iroquois (Hau de no sau nee) of their own history and the Beaver wars:

Nations learned that to be without firearms meant physical annihilation. To be without access to beaver pelts meant no means to buy firearms.

Trade meant that long routes over which goods had to be transported had to be secured. The only way that was possible was for the entire area to be in friendly hands. Any potential disruptor of the trade routes must either be pacified or eliminated.[7]

There are certain parallels between the pattern of European-Indian relations and that between Europeans and Africans on the African coasts. The latter has been characterised as the 'gun-slave cycle'; perhaps the situation in North America could be termed a 'gun-fur cycle'. The relative autonomy of certain African peoples (the Oyo empire, Fon, Ashantis, etc.) in controlling their end of the trade cycle and conducting their own politics is generally acknowledged; the same recognition is due to the Iroquois and other Indian nations. Out of necessity, amidst new dynamics introduced by foreign peoples, the people held their own ground.

Gradually, as trade dependency deepened and the consequences of unequal exchange made themselves felt, as trappers and merchants made place for military trading posts, as the supply of pelts dried up and as the numbers and the land hunger of settlers increased, the balance of power between Europeans and Indians shifted. The time when a concerted attack of Indian nations could have wiped out the newcomers was past. Earlier attacks, by the Powhatan confederacy on Jamestown in 1622, and again in 1644, by the Pequot nation in Connecticut Valley in 1636, and even by the Wampanoag confederacy of twenty tribes brought together by Philip of Pokanoket for a coordinated attack on New England in 1675, had all been bloodily defeated. Now, as the balance of power shifted, the Europeans and their conflicts became preponderant factors, and it is perhaps this later period that could be called a 'manipulation period', in which Indian nations were used to fight inter-European wars. Except that, even then, this would underestimate Indian autonomy and the extent to which the Europeans were constrained and at times forced into action by their Indian allies.

In this period – lasting, at most, from the late seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century – the keynote of Indian-white relations was no longer the fur trade but *land*. This introduced other dynamics into the situation. On the one hand, as Hunt noted, the fur trade divided the tribes, but on the question of land they could cooperate. On the other hand, the creeping advance of the Europeans began to push Indian peoples into the territories of other nations, and this intensified intertribal conflicts. With England in control of the Atlantic seaboard, Frenchmen entrenched in Canada and along the Mississippi river, and Spain in Florida and the south-west, the Indians in the east found themselves surrounded by white men.

The Ottawa war chief Pontiac was the Indian leader who took the politics of alignment to its ultimate consequence. The Ottawa had participated as French allies in the French and Indian war against the English that began in 1754; but after the capitulation of the French in 1760, Pontiac took up the war again: 'Englishman! – Although you have conquered the French, you have not yet conquered us!'[8] The confederacy organised by Pontiac had outstanding military success – in two months every Ohio Valley and Great Lakes military post was lost by the British and the remaining forts, including Fort Detroit, were under siege by Pontiac's forces. It was under these circumstances that General Amherst wrote to Colonel Henry Bouquet in Pennsylvania his counsel of despair: 'Could it not be contrived to send the small pox among the disaffected tribes of Indians? We must on this occasion use every stratagem in our power to reduce them'; and again, 'You will do well to try to inoculate the Indians by means of blankets, as well as to try every other method that can serve to extirpate this execrable race.'[9]

But at this stage, the assistance from the French (and the Spanish) that Pontiac hoped for was not forthcoming. For at the time of Pontiac's attack on Detroit, in May 1763, the English had already waxed victorious over France – not only in North America but also in West Africa, the West Indies and India – and the Peace of Paris, concluded in 1763, sealed what is considered 'the most brilliant and significant British victory of modern history'. Pontiac conducted his politics in a regional theatre, whereas the outcome of the Anglo-French conflict was being decided in the global arena. The dialectics between a local theatre and geopolitics, and ignorance of the geopolitical ramifications of a conflict, has frequently turned out to be a trap for local anti-imperialist militants.

Nonetheless, the consequences of what is called Pontiac's rebellion for the course of American history were profound: 'The British Crown, in a hasty effort to stop the rebellion and prevent new rebellions from breaking out, set an official line of demarcation between the Indian and the colonists. This line ran along the crest of the Appalachian Mountains from north to south and prohibited white settlement west of this line ... the proclamation also outlawed private purchase of Indian property.'[10]

Tecumseh's call for a red nation

> The annihilation of our race is at hand unless we unite in one common cause against the common foe.
>
> *Tecumseh addressing the Chocktaws, 1811*

This was the end of an era: European competition over North America was at an end, Anglo-Saxon hegemony was secure. The locus of conflict shifted – it was now between the settlers and the British government.

Notably, the proclamation of October 1763 directly confronted the land hunger of the settlers: 'It infuriated the colonists, especially the colonists on the western frontiers'; and it may be viewed 'as a precipitating cause of the "American" Revolution against the Crown taxes on tea and other things'.[11]

The politics of playing off European rivals against one another and against rival tribes now no longer worked; an entirely new situation had come into being for Indian Americans. Knowing what they could expect from the settlers, 'not a single Indian tribe of consequence joined the colonists in the "American" revolution of 1776'.[12] Indians, of course, never considered American independence as 'their' independence; they understood it, as did Indians in South America, as the independence of European settlers in expropriating and exploiting Indian lands. White settlements now pushed into the North West Territory of Kentucky and Ohio and were met with Indian guerilla warfare. Indian war societies from six nations, led by Little Turtle, defeated the US Army in two battles, in 1790 and 1791 – the latter was described as 'one of the worst routs ever suffered by an American army'; but a third confrontation, the battle of the Fallen Timbers, ended in defeat for the Indians. In the subsequent treaty of Greenville (1795) nearly two-thirds of Ohio had to be given up.

'With the decrease of competition for Indian trade between different European groups, a major force that had worked to set nation against nation was weakened.'[13] After 300 years of dealing with rival European powers, Indians were left with a single opponent, the United States. Inspired by prophets who engendered an Indian religious revival, a new spirit of unity emerged. That unity, embodied in the League of the Iroquois and the great Creek and Shawnee confederacies that had been in existence before the Europeans came, embodied in the fighting confederacy assembled by Pontiac, the confederacy brought together by Joseph Brant, was now brought to its culmination by the Shawnee leader, Tecumseh, in his vision of a red nation.

> ... unlike all previous native leaders, he looked beyond the mere resistance by a tribe or group of tribes to white encroachments. He was a Shawnee, but he considered himself first an Indian, and fought to give all Indians a national rather than a tribal consciousness, and to unite them in defence of a common homeland ...
>
> As the greatest Indian nationalist, Tecumseh countered American expansionism with Indian unity, preaching for the first time that Indian land belonged to all the tribes in common ...[14]

Tecumseh participated in the battles led by Little Turtle but refused to be a part of the signing of the treaty of Greenville. A united Indian position on the lands that were their common heritage had become a logical option ever since the existence of the demarcation line between Indian

territory and white lands established in 1763. Earlier, in 1793, this position had been taken by the Mohawk chief, Joseph Brant. Tecumseh carried this development further.

He specifically protested against the practice of signing separate treaties; as he told Governor Harrison at Vincennes:

> You endeavour to make distinctions. You wish to prevent the Indians doing as we wish them – to unite, and let them consider their lands as the common property of the whole ... you want, by your distinctions of Indian tribes in allotting to each a particular tract of land, to make them to war with each other.
>
> The way, and the only way, to check and to stop this evil, is, for all the red men to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land; as it was at first, and should be yet; for it never was divided, but belongs to all, for the use of each. That no part has a right to sell, even to each other, much less to strangers ... [15]

Establishing his base at Tippecanoe, removed from the white frontier, Tecumseh also reformed tribal politics: 'Since my residence at Tippecanoe we have endeavoured to level all distinctions – to destroy village chiefs, by whom all mischief is done. It is they who sell our lands to the Americans. Our object is to let our affairs be transacted by warriors.'[16] His third and most momentous step was, after negotiations with Governor Harrison had become bogged down, to call the Indian tribes to a united war against the white Americans. To this end he travelled incessantly for four years, taking his message to the Chocktaws, the Creeks in the south-west, to the Seminole in Florida, to the Osages, the Potawatamies, and to the Huron in the north.

The unity called for by Tecumseh raised, as always, questions of leadership (united under whose leadership) and strategy. The leadership of most of the tribes that Tecumseh called on refused to heed his call. Tecumseh had to go against the currents of both traditional tribal politics and the divide-and-rule tactics of the US government. Slicing off tribes by separate treaties and promises was only one of the stratagems used. The objective of the US government was to turn the Indians from hunters into agriculturalists, who would then no longer need as much land. One of the methods for accelerating this transformation was, as President Jefferson wrote to Governor Harrison in 1803, to subsidise state trading houses to supply the Indians at cost prices: 'we shall push our trading houses, and be glad to see the good and influential individuals among them [the Indians] in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands.'[17] In other words, a strategy of bribery, creating political dependency through debt, aimed at chiefs – precisely what Tecumseh had denounced. Later, the

premeditated assault which resulted in the extermination of the buffalo became an even more effective method of warfare, striking at the economic base of the hunting tribes. By then, virtually every conceivable method from germ warfare, psychological warfare using alcohol, economic warfare through trade and debt, ecological warfare using the reservation system, cultural warfare prohibiting Indian ceremonies, had come to be included in a politics of constantly increasing pressure in which military campaigns represented only the tip of the iceberg.

As none before him, Tecumseh gauged the implications of the white men's advance. Tecumseh's vision extended far beyond the horizon of tribal politics: the urgency of his call to a united stand stemmed from the realisation that unless Indians came together, the extinction of the race might be at hand. In all of the speeches to the tribes he visited this is the theme that comes through time and again. Unity was a condition for the survival of the Indian peoples.

In October 1811 Tecumseh told the Creeks: 'Soon shall you see my arm of fire stretched athwart the sky. I will stamp my foot at Tippecanoe, and the very earth shall shake.'[18] Just as Popé before him, in 1680, had used cords of maguey fibres with knots tied in them to mark the number of days before joint action, Tecumseh gave out bundles of red sticks to count down time. Eventually the Creeks did take up the hatchet, as did the Seminoles, but not until after a civil war in which many of those who had resisted Tecumseh's call were killed, and not in the coordinated battlefront that Tecumseh had sought to create. During Tecumseh's absence, his base at Tippecanoe was raided and destroyed by Governor Harrison. Indian war societies retaliated with guerilla warfare, which, the Americans alleged, was being supported by the British from their forts in Canada. This was one of the developments that prompted the US declaration of war on England in June 1812. Tecumseh took a leading part in the war (he was appointed Brigadier-General by the British, although he did not wear the uniform), but it was not the great Indian war he had sought. He was fighting on the side of the British, rather than with British backing, and the British were fighting the US with reluctance. Tecumseh attributed this hesitancy to cowardice on the part of the British commander, but it probably also stemmed from instructions from London calling for restraint. England and the white (predominantly Anglo-)Americans already had the common satisfaction of ousting the French from North America; now they had a common interest in outmanoeuvring the Spanish in South America. Thus, unknown to Tecumseh, just as Pontiac had been unaware of the global political ramifications, there were larger interests at stake which called, in the long run, for Anglo-American cooperation. Tecumseh died in this war — the harbinger of Indian nationalism perished in the last battle involving Indians which was based on a conflict between Europeans.

The wars of the Plains

The period that followed was marked by the three Seminole wars and the forced removal of Indians from the south-east. The Indian Removal Bill (1830) was adopted under the presidency of General Jackson, when the 'West' was opened and the 'American way of life' took shape, the era famed for 'Jacksonian Democracy' – a democracy which, however, in the vein of exclusionist settler colonialism, excluded Indians and blacks. But his vision of Indian nationalism did not die with Tecumseh: 'There is an unbroken line of nationalist armed struggle from Tecumseh, to the Creek confederacy, to the three Seminole wars with the US up to 1840. When the US had militarily crushed the resistance, wealthy planters had occupied the lands and the Indian occupants involved had been removed to Oklahoma Territory, the focus of Indian nationalist struggle shifted to the Plains, with the formation of powerful confederacies led by the Sioux.'[19]

Beginning in 1861-3, when the Cheyennes took to the war path (coinciding with the 1861-5 Civil War), a struggle unfolded which was to occupy the US army for thirty years. The main phases of the Western war, according to the US army record, were the first phase of reversal (1867-9), a critical phase in which many western forts had to be abandoned, a phase of decision (1870s), a phase of mopping-up (1880s) involving the last Apache bands, and a finis (1890-1) which included the Wounded Knee massacre.

The Plains Indian 'has been characterised as among the most formidable fighters met during the entire frontier experience':

> The mobility, tactics, arms, and training of the Plains Indians helped to make the Western War distinctive. The horse and the buffalo enabled him to hold out as long as he did, checking the advance of both the Spaniard and the Anglo-Saxon for a longer period than any other American aborigine was able to retard European invaders in the temperate zone. Because the Plains Indian lived in a horse culture, he was the only American Indian who was always mounted ... He was a nomad without a settled village which could be made the target of attack ... Mobile warfare, fought by a mobile civilisation, enabled the Plains Indian to frustrate even veterans who had learned something about mobility in the Civil War.[20]

This was the era known by the names of war chiefs such as Little Crow, Big Eagle, Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, Geronimo, Cochise and Chief Joseph. One of the greatest shocks to white America was the defeat of the elite Seventh Cavalry under Colonel Custer: 'It was the kind of humiliating defeat that simply could not be handed to a modern nation of 40 million people by a few scarecrow savages. Especially not in the very middle of the great centennial celebration ... ' In effect, 'Crazy

Horse and Sitting Bull lost by winning. Troops harried them without mercy, and the Indians had no means of keeping a standing army in the field indefinitely.'[21] These imbalances, in numbers and economic development, ultimately took their toll, and modern weapons in combination with the extermination of the buffalo completed the American enterprise. After 1866, the breech-loading rifle and the revolver came into use, followed by heavier weapons – Gatling guns and howitzers. At Wounded Knee, it was Hotchkiss guns that killed most of the 300 that perished out of the 350 Minneconjou Sioux.

As Black Elk said: 'a people's dream died there.' Yet this is also true: 'Not only did this unrelenting warfare absorb the resources of the US as a state, but more important, it assured Indian survival and the maintenance of a land base, however narrow ... The treaties represent victory even in the face of defeat', in the words of Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz.[22] The value of resistance is measured not simply by whether or not its stated goals are achieved, but rather by the likely course of development in the absence of resistance. Armed resistance, from the Powhatan confederacy to the Nez Percés, pressured the European Americans and forced concessions from them, even when they possessed overwhelming superiority in numbers and technology. The attack on New England by the Wampanoag confederacy, led by Philip of Pokanoket in 1675, even though defeated, was among the circumstances that set the stage for the first treaty, between William Penn and the Delaware Nation in 1682. The successes of the Sioux in the Plains wars in the 1860s led up to the 1868 Fort Laramie treaty, famed as 'one of a very few times that Indians were able to dictate the terms of peace'. Conversely, the end of the critical phase in the Indian wars coincided with the termination, in 1871, of the practice of concluding treaties with Indian nations.

Limited as they were, 'tools of peaceful invasion and conquest', and leaving a trail of broken promises, the treaties yet recognised Indian sovereignty and assured the survival of Indians even if under barely minimal conditions. They provided a land base and focal points of Indian identity, which could sustain enduring 'cultures of struggle and resistance'. On this basis, the Indian struggle could resurrect in different forms in the course of the twentieth century – as cultural emancipation, civil and human rights struggles. In a song of the Thunderbird Sisters which chronicles some of the recent manifestations of Indian resistance, these connections, links in the great chain of Indian resistance, are illustrated:

> We are the children of our ancestors
> born in the seventh generation
> We are the ones they fought to protect
> so we could build a new nation
> They lived a lifetime in those years

The occupation of Alcatraz
The takeover of the BIA
The liberation of Wounded Knee
The independent Nation of Caughnawaga
The reclaiming of the abbey by Menomini
The walk from California to DC
The creation of the Women of all Red Nations
The sovereign rights of Akwesasne.[23]

Prophecy and resistance

The deterministic preoccupation of many Marxists with material conditions and technical factors has led to a general neglect of the autonomous force of spiritual motives as decisive factors throughout the entire history of humanity.

Wim Wertheim, 1970

In our ways spiritual consciousness is the highest form of politics.

Haudenosaunee, 1977

A key role in inspiring American Indian resistance has been played by medicine men and prophets or visionaries. In the older literature, this is mentioned frequently as a matter of course, but rarely is it discussed.

There are several facets to the role played by traditional religion which it may be helpful to distinguish. In the first place, religion or spirituality forms a part of human experience – dreams, visions, altered states of consciousness represent human faculties as much as physical, emotional, mental activities, as modes of obtaining and digesting experience. Second, in most societies religion stands in a certain relationship to power – considered to be identical with it, forming its foundation, or somehow orienting or guiding authority. Also, nowadays, some spiritual referent is seldom far removed from any centre of power, although the extent to which this is publicised varies greatly. Third, religion bears a certain relation to warfare, perhaps an aspect of societal conduct which is in need of spiritual sanction more than almost any other, precisely because of its proximity to the borderline between life and death. It is here that the role of prophecy in relation to Indian resistance comes in.

These roles played by religion are by no means unique to traditional societies – with some exceptions, they are almost universal to human societies. In interpreting the role of Indian prophecy, it serves to bear in mind its relationship to the totality and logic of human experience. Similar phenomena have been observed in relation to many resistance and revolutionary movements,[24] although they are not commonly discussed – earlier because they were dismissed as 'superstitious', and presently due to the prevailing marxist framework in interpreting revolutionary and anti-imperialist movements.

For the Europeans, religion formed part, and an important part, of the experience of conquest. If it served as a weapon of resistance, it was also an instrument of conquest. Religion has served not merely as an inspiration for and justification of conquest, but also as an instrument of control and psychological warfare, in the sphere nowadays referred to as the 'battle for hearts and minds'. This has been the case from the *reducciones* controlled by the Catholic Church in sixteenth-century Iberian America, to the 'missionary dictatorships' which accompanied the reservation system established by President Grant, to the evangelical organisations currently active in Latin America.[25] As the Haudenosaunee drily observe: 'Missionaries spread more than the word of God.'[26] But it is indigenous spiritual politics which are at issue now.

Indian religion has played, and continues to play, a creative role at every stage of Indian-white relations: as the foundation of Indian sovereignty, in resistance, defeat and resurrection. The European invasion and conquest represented not only a political and material crisis but a spiritual and moral crisis as well. As for other peoples who had not made contact with the European world before, their arrival introduced a new element – 'just the knowledge of their existence forces people to reassess completely their sense of their own place within the universe.'[27] Dreams and prophecies often announced the coming of the white men before they actually arrived. Among the Klikitat Indians on the west coast, decades before the Europeans actually appeared, the Washani religion of dream dances developed, as 'one of the first of the many waves of prophecy and dancing which swept through American Indian tribes of the Plains and the West coast when they were confronted by the white men'.[28] The prophecies said that a new race of men was coming bearing gifts for the Indians, while other prophecies told of the coming destruction of the Indian nation. Such dual features were also to be found in the prophecies relating to Quetzalcoatl (Aztec) and Kukulcan (Maya), essentially gods of rebirth and resurrection whose composite nature indicated the process of spiritual achievement overcoming the bondage of material conditions.

A similar way of thinking, based on the unity of opposites in process, in European thought is dialectics – a mode of thought that stems from Greek philosophy where it formed part of the philosophical thought common to antiquity both in the Hellenic world and in the Orient. The root idea of the unity of opposites was no doubt earlier expressed in religious thought, where it is a familiar notion – for instance in the Vedic description of Shiva as both creator and destroyer. With Marx, dialectics was essential to the interpretation of the inherently contradictory nature of capitalism, as in his famous dictum about the impact of English colonialism on India: both destructive of old, communal society and creative in implanting the seed of capitalist development. It is striking that a similar line of thinking (although not identical in content) is

expressed in prophetic-religious form among American Indians relating to a certain ambivalence surrounding the coming of the white men.

In Indian societies, the principles of social and political organisation derived from a spiritual world view. Sacred bundles, wampum belts, totem poles or other ceremonial objects betokened this spiritual charter, as did elaborate temples and sacred books among peoples in the south. The spiritual tradition established the people's relationship with the universe, and as such, it formed the core of their inheritance, a source of self-confidence and the foundation of their sovereignty.

The powerful League of the Iroquois, which related to Europeans through negotiated settlements and alliances on the basis of sovereignty rather than abject dependence – a trendsetting influence in having Indian sovereignty recognised – was itself rooted in a profound spiritual legacy: the Great Law of Peace. It conferred on the Haudenosaunee a strong sense of their continuity as a people: 'Our culture is among the most ancient continuously existing cultures in the world.'[29]

It is clear, then, that to Indians any political attack would be experienced also as a spiritual assault. As the arrival of the Europeans occasioned a spiritual readjustment, so did European aggression. As Crazy Horse was to say, the white men represented a 'new Power'.[30] As such, they had to be met in the way Indians customarily reacted to dilemma or novelty, by their seeking new powers themselves, through vision questing, dances or ceremonies. Hence every turn of the road, every stand taken by Indians in defence of their identity and their rights, was accompanied by a religious reorientation, of the kind usually referred to as a 'religious revival'.

Almost invariably, the names of the great war chiefs occur in conjunction with the names of prophets, who contributed the spiritual regeneration that created the moral basis for resistance. The Pueblo revolt was a religious war in origin, organised by medicine men, notably Popé, a Tewa medicine man from Taos. Pontiac's name is connected to that of the Delaware Prophet.

The years following the American revolution were a period of particularly profound crisis for North American Indians. White settlers swarmed into Indian territory and with them, disease, death, liquor, degeneration, prostitution and poverty, and a general erosion of the Indian identity. In these years a 'force of regeneration and of Indian unity made itself felt in the teachings of Indian prophets who preached that the Indians must forsake the white man's teachings and his influence', prophets 'reasserting a clear division between the ways of the white man and the ways of the Indian'.[31] In the east, the Seneca prophet, Handsome Lake, preached this Indian way; in the north-west, the most well-known prophet was Tekwansa, Tecumseh's brother. Formerly a drunk, he began to preach against alcohol and for abstinence from all of the white men's ways. With Tecumseh, 'Together they

became a force that on the one hand apppealed to Indian spiritual pride and self-respect and on the other, demanded strength and unity for the struggle against the white advance.'[32] Tekwansa (Open Door) was also known as the Shawnee Prophet. The 'retreat of Tippecanoe', the base they established remote from the white frontier and its corrosive influence, carried a religious as well as a political significance: spiritually, it was a place of cleansing that drew many followers from every tribe in the north-west; politically, it set up a contrast with the Indians known as the 'Hangers around the fort', i.e., Indians susceptible to the manipulations of the white men.[33]

The war years of the nineteenth century also saw the appearance of prophets, sometimes in the guise of war chiefs. The name of Black Hawk is associated with that of White Cloud, the Winnebago Prophet. Osceola, a chief in the Second Seminole War, was named after Black Drink, a ceremonial purification medicine. Crazy Horse was the son of a Sioux holy man and Black Elk speaks about him as 'our great chief and priest Crazy Horse': 'he received most of his great power through the "lamenting" which he did many times a year', so Black Elk explains.[34] His was the era of what T.E. Mails called *the Mystic Warriors of the Plains*.

Without this spiritual dimension, the resistance which held the Europeans at bay for so long would not have been possible — before resistance can be a political or military reality, it must first be a psychological reality. As Balandier remarked about decolonisation movements, *libération psychologique* is an essential precondition for political liberation.[35] Spiritual regeneration, therefore, is not just a byproduct or background music to indigenous resistance, but rather its wellspring and epicentre.

Traditional religion was involved not only in motivating Indian resistance but also in organising it. The spiritual foundations of Indian societies also found expression in the clans and war societies, each with its particular medicine ways. There was a close bond, as in most other societies, between warriors and shamans. The shaman has been characterised as the sacred politician: 'The shaman's work entails maintaining balance in the human community as well as in the relationships between the community and the gods or divine forces that direct the life of the culture.'[36]

The warrior and the shaman are kin in that the medicine man is also a warrior of a kind — Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan, for instance, frequently describes himself as a warrior. In his turn, the warrior also 'makes medicine' in preparation for battle. Every description of Indian warrior ways includes how soul-cleansing ceremonies precede battle, as they do the killing of animals in the hunt.[37] Power on the battlefield, which means personal courage to the Indian brave, is fuelled from the same source as spiritual strength. To the warriors of the Plains, purification

rites and vision quests are the same as Shinto ceremonies and Zen meditations to the Samurai: rites of consecration and exercises in self-mastery.

When, in the 1880s, defeat was becoming a glaring reality, this necessitated yet another spiritual reorientation: 'Thoroughly defeated by the might of the white man's armies, removed from their sacred homeland, with their leaders killed or rendered powerless, the Indians were at a point where only a spiritual revival could bring them from the depths of despair.'[38] It was this crisis that produced Wavoka's Ghost Dance, the Drum religion or Powwow introduced by Tail Feather Woman among northern tribes, the spreading of the Peyote cult, as the Native American Church, and Black Elk's vision of the sacred tree. The Ghost Dance was a movement that still inspired resistance, but the massacre of Ghost Dancers at Wounded Knee in 1890 was the end of it. The other cults and perspectives were concerned not with resistance but with reorientation, under a new moon and a horizon dominated by Europeans. They enabled Indians to maintain their identity and their sanity, amidst the depth of misery. As new departures, different from the traditional ceremonies, they gave sustenance in the time of transition, comparable perhaps to the cargo cults of Melanesian societies.

Time and again, then, political shifts have been accompanied by religious reorientations, testifying to the wholeness of American Indian culture. This has also been the case south of the Rio Grande. In Mexico in 1810, and again in 1910, rebelling Indian peasants marched to demand land in the name of the Virgin of Guadelupe. The Virgin of Guadelupe is another instance of Indians following their own religion under Christian camouflage: 'the scene of her appearance to the Indian Juan Diego was a hill that formerly contained a sanctuary dedicated to Tonantzin, "Our Mother", the Aztec goddess of fertility.' Many Indians still call her Guadelupe-Tonantzin.[39] Tonantzin is also an aspect of the widely worshipped Corn Mother. Catholics gave her the name of the Virgin, which signifies another concept of motherhood, as mother of Christ. The syncretism of the Indian Virgin, a merger of Indian and Christian heavens, served to facilitate the European political take-over and spiritual penetration of Indian society. It also forms part of a civilisational synthesis which in Mexico is more developed than anywhere else.

For North American Indians, the period from the 1880s to the 1920s was a dark time of demoralisation and poverty. In the United States neocolonialism was institutionalised successively through measures such as the Dawes Act (1886), which sought to turn Indian lands into privately owned allotments, the American Indian Citizenship Act (1924), the Indian Reorganisation Act (1934), which provided for local self-determination although under the federal tutelage of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Indian Claims Commission Act (1946), which was

marred by too many loopholes, and the Termination Policy of the 1950s, which sought to eliminate the treaties.

From the late 1960s, simultaneous with a vast global upsurge of mass activism, there was an Indian awakening and a growth of mass movements. 1968 saw both the occupation of Alcatraz and the birth of the American Indian Movement (AIM). During the 1970s, there were many manifestations of Indian mass activism, of which the take-over of Wounded Knee in 1973 is the most well known. The Indian resurrection was, as before, accompanied by a spiritual reawakening and a mass return to traditional ceremonies. And as they did to the war societies of earlier times, medicine men act as the spiritual advisors of Indian political organisations, such as AIM.

In the different countries of Central and South America, divergent cyclical rhythms of activism and recuperation existed, but in the 1970s and 1980s, there has been an Indian resurrection here also – among the Quechua and Aymara peoples in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, the Amazonian peoples in Brazil and Paraguay, the Mapuches in Chile, and Indian peoples in Colombia, Venezuela and Panama. Sendero Luminoso, presently active in Peru, is essentially a Quechua movement. The massive participation, particularly since 1980, of Indians in the guerilla movements in Guatemala is well known. It is a participation which is consistent with the Indian world view which, underneath the mimicry of conditional assimilation, has retained its integrity and continues to be inspired by the perspectives and prophecies of the sacred book, the *Popol Vuh.*

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TOM DENYER

Obreros en la corazon del bruto*

Perhaps the story is apocryphal, but about fifteen years ago it was at-
tributed to members of the Venceremos Brigade, returning to the United
States from cutting sugar cane in Cuba. They had encountered Che
Guevara, to whom they had expressed their envy at his good fortune. He
could participate directly, after all, in the construction of a revolu-
tionary society, while they were destined to be interlopers, on the out-
side looking in. Guevara's response reportedly impressed them. 'Your
struggle is the more important. It is in the heart of the beast.'

Whether or not Guevara was correct to attribute primary significance
to the struggle within the metropole, the location itself deserves close
observation for favourable signs, especially when there seem to be so
few. In order to sharpen our gaze, in hopes of discovering more than
meets the eye, we might find it helpful to examine three familiar plot
structures. Each shares the argument that a commitment to historical
materialism does not necessarily force us to rely on economic categories
for our projections of the workers' political futures.

Cultures and capitalism

Many different stories about economic development, for example, con-
tain a theme contrasting aboriginal ways of life with those resulting

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* Workers in the heart of the beast.

from the intrusion of capitalism. In contrast, the story-teller points to the aftermath of gains and losses, and asks the listener to accept the teller's preferred evaluation of those gains and losses.

As an illustration, consider the following story-line. Aboriginal peoples evolve ways of life which make them attractive and, ironically, vulnerable to capitalist intrusion. Typically, the aboriginal way of life involves itself intimately with nature, an intimacy emblazoned throughout the people's culture. Sadly, capitalist intrusion requires the domination of nature, primarily because the time frame required for profitable exploitation collapses the far longer periods required for natural recovery. Hence, the intrusion almost invariably results in the loss of intimacy, since that part of the culture which does not lend itself to profitable commodification is discarded as irrational or reactionary. The loss, however, seldom happens without a struggle, one in which the cultural emblems of a people's intimacy with nature provide a principal reference.

We need not be naive about the many controversies such a story-line generates. We can concede, for example, that the old ways are not necessarily the best; and that capitalist technology and bourgeois culture will presumably bequeath some worthwhile legacy to the next world epoch. At the moment, however, we can still use the story-line as a point of departure for its own elaboration and modification. We can suggest, as many have, that the political struggle to preserve truly human ways of life is not a neat, Aristotelean drama – circumscribed by capitalist intrusion at the beginning, capitalist hegemony in the middle, and revolution and socialist construction in the end. Instead, the intimate involvement with nature persists, providing food for thought and fuel for struggle.[1]

A parallel story-line tells how the development of the individual person encounters the prohibitions and inducements of an inevitably repressive civilisation. The aboriginal human, the infant, the ontogenetic recapitulation of phylogeny, enters the world as vulnerable yet ripe for development. Then, however, its instincts undergo a series of vicissitudes which crush the infant's untrammelled, individualistic demands for erotic satiation and Nirvanic quiescence. Unhappy reason interferes with Faustian exultation in nature. Nevertheless, until death and the organic reabsorption accompanying it, the repressed continually returns, poking through like an old mole, carrying with it the vestiges of the aboriginal repertoire for involvement in the material and social world. So new forms of accommodation and confrontation emerge: in some cases, the authoritarian patriarch and potential fascist; in others, the Don Juan of decadent consumption and rotating pleasures; in others, the artist, with frustration sublimated into concise expression; in others, the stoic, resigned daily to a world encumbered by the traditions of all the dead generations; in others, the politician displacing private

motives on to public objects. Yet whatever forms individuals choose for the expression of their difficulties, the basic fact remains that: 'There is nothing that the madness of men invents which is not either nature made manifest or nature restored.'[2]

Consider yet another, parallel story-line. At one time, the epoch-making innovation that stood as the quintessential emblem of urban-industrial civilisation, and as the primary producer-consumer of capital, was the railroad. Leaders of capital today point to the electronic computer as the next defining instrument of domination. In the lingering meantime, however, our icon remains the automobile.

It serves and masters us in ways ranging from virgin bower to high-speed coffin. It employs directly and indirectly a sizeable proportion of the US labour force. Its history – from the Duryea brothers' first 'motor wagon' in 1895 to 1977, when US manufacturers recalled more cars than they built, and to 1980, when the Japanese gained the world lead in auto production – is widely understood as the principal index of the US rise to and fall from world industrial domination. It is, above all, a machine: a highly refined device for obtaining work from energy, applied to objects according to concepts of elementary mechanics.

Yet, like all machines, and despite all the extensive and sophisticated human interventions into their progress through space and time, the automobile emerged originally from the bowels of the earth, and to there it inevitably returns. Sooner or later, nature and its Second Law of Thermodynamics laugh last at our pretensions. We decompose in our graveyards, the automobiles in theirs. A visit to any junkyard, and its scene of wandering bands of the working poor scavenging the remains, will vindicate the suspicion lurking in western society since at least the last century: that our uneven ascent from hunter-gatherer has been a fool's errand.

The heart of the beast

My reactions to these story-lines were influenced by three years' experience in those archetypes of capitalist production known as machine shops. The four shops were in New Jersey, New York City, upstate New York and Texas. They employed respectively from about half a dozen to a hundred machinists. The work force in each consisted predominantly of racial and ethnic minorities and migrants.[3]

Most machine-tool work within the United States takes place in one of two contexts. In one, the tool and die-maker in a large factory and the general machinist in the small 'job shop' make parts almost from start to finish. The machinist might, for example, draw a sketch or draft a print of the part, choose the material, heat treat it, use a variety of hand and machine tools in a sequence the machinist considers appropriate, and even assemble and test a completed mechanism. The machinist

might have an influential voice in consultations with customers, engineers, draftsmen, inspectors and managers on how to proceed with the part.

Most machinists do not , however, work that way. The pace and scope of modern industrial production will not tolerate the time and costs of training every machinist in every aspect of such an extremely complex trade. Thus, most machinists 'run production' in factories and shops making parts for which markets are large, and steady or at least recurrent. The production machinist usually stays at one machine for an entire shift, or for days or weeks, and even for years in some cases. Furthermore, the machinist might only operate the machine after a set-up man or leadman has installed the tooling and selected feeds and speeds. That is, managers and supervisors have decided beforehand that a particular machine and set of tools will perform a single operation on a specific part. They presume that the company will sell enough products using that part so that the costs of devoting expensive personnel to organising production will still allow a profit, due to the increased production actually done by the worker and the dead labour in the machine. To put it another way, the managerial organisation of the productive process leads management into calculating a 'rate': the time within which the machinist must and 'should' complete the part, in order to vindicate managerial predictions of profit.[4]

This familiar, hierarchical division of labour means that the production machinist must do the work of a skilled craftsperson, making decisions incorporating experience, judgement and instinct; but somehow collapsing those into a series of brief, redundant moments, without losing the attention to detail that preserves the quality of the part and the safety of the worker. The problem parallels closely those indicated by Walter Benjamin in his famous essay on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. That is, the perceptual organs and the cognitive habits guiding them grow dull and leaden, as a formerly intense experience grows routine, boring, even aggravating in its seemingly endless sameness. In the machinist's case, the originally intense experience was that of mastering some very complex aspects of the material world. That intensity fades, however, as the experience repeats itself ad nauseam.

Hence, machinists learn to believe that despite their skills, their labour is worth only as much as the market value, and therefore the quantity, of products that leave their machines. The process of making skilled judgements is not one in which the machinist uses tools creatively and even lovingly in order to achieve a desired result – the work of the architect as opposed to that of the spider or bee – but one in which the machine, material, blueprint, maintenance mechanic, quality control inspector, scheduler and foreman, all become obstacles to the Sisyphean chore of meeting production quotas. That is, this pro-

totypically capitalist organisation of production needs to take from the machinist every medium of self-expression except that of making as many or more than the number of parts demanded by management or made by co-workers. The instinct, or whatever we may care to designate this yearning, to alter material reality into a form recognisable as personally creative, gets redirected into a violent confrontation with instinctual frustration.[5]

In defending this organisation of production, apologists often say that, first, it simply represents a tried and proven way of completing efficiently some very complex, interrelated tasks, and therefore benefits everyone with increased production and leisure time. Second, they say, it simply reflects the organisation of the social macrocosm within the shop microcosm. The costs to the machinist's dignity, apologists might add, are clearly regrettable, but there is a way out. Like cream, the aggressive producer can rise to the top, and some do. In order to say that this defence is a mystification of exploitation, we need to understand more thoroughly how such organisation comes into being and persists.

The ontology of the modern factory

Put simply, a 'company' is an organisational device for interpreting market signals and translating them into immediate commands for workers, tools and materials. It is as ephemeral as its own incorporation papers, as both mergers and also the global mobility of capital so often remind us. Concretely, even though temporarily, the organisation includes controlling stockholders or majority owners, executives, managers and supervisors, and the flow of words, numbers and other symbols among them. The organisation persists, as the apologists are so fond of reminding us, only so long as it organises production profitably. That is, it persists only so long as the monetary value for which company products are exchanged exceeds the monetary value spent on productive inputs: land, labour, rent and capital, for example.[6]

In the profitable maintenance of a company, supervisors take the last and most unsavoury steps in the translation of market signals into immediate commands to the individual worker: for example, to leave the plant, to operate a dangerous or unfamiliar machine, to produce more or to express the correct attitude towards company policy. Indeed, experienced union organisers presume that supervisors are weak links in the company's chain of defences. Supervisors usually emerge from the ranks of production workers, since some direct knowledge of production processes helps maintain the supervisor's credibility, and since a supervisory position is traditionally one of the largest carrots held before the production machinist. Their origins and aspirations, however, can make supervisors vulnerable to crudeness, favouritism, and arbitrariness.

Yet modern companies have gained some sophistication about their first line of defence. They know that mistreatment, inconsistency and real or imagined disrespect catalyse union organising, even if wages, hours and the more physical working conditions later seem the points of conflict. Nevertheless, production organised primarily for profit favours weakness in the supervisory link, even for the sophisticated company, since profitable production must respond to market whims, and not to the subjective needs of individual workers. The foreman must therefore respond to those whims, in a version translated through the layers of a managerial hierarchy, and yet still confront those needs, directly, every shift.

On the upside of the business cycle, supervisors must discipline problem employees, reward the company man and tolerate those with incorrect attitudes but essential skills. On the downside of the cycle, the supervisor must somehow maintain morale, even though he has lost the carrots for enticing company men, and for the others has only the hostile stick of dismissal into a glutted labour market, a stick which can produce only grudging cooperation.

The company's problems, however, surpass those produced by the business cycle, even though they are profound in an industry as cyclical as metal-working. Not unlike a government which claims to want both stability and also democracy, a company must say it seeks not only quantity in production, but also quality and safety. Unfortunately, most manufacturing textbooks will say that while engineering standards establish ideal allowances for how much the dimensions of manufactured parts may vary, the costs of production establish the actual machining tolerances for those dimensions. Admittedly, a good machinist can make parts 'to the print' more quickly than a less skilled machinist, given equal familiarity with the machines and materials used. Even a good machinist, however, needs more time to produce parts with close tolerances. Thus, when the company through the voices of its supervisors says 'quality', the real meaning is quality within the tolerances allowed by the market place, not within the tolerances fantasised by engineering standards. The machinist learns this truth soon enough. Not surprisingly, this knowledge, that the company must actually seek to minimise quality and that the supervisor must parrot a lie, lends itself to cynicism.[7]

The official concern for safety also contributes to healthy cynicism. While the company does lose production time and benefits claims to accidents, the company gains more from a worker who redlines himself and his tools, and somehow manages to keep eyes, hands, machine and part substantially intact. A series of related realisations accompanies these about the company's real concerns. For example, suggestions for improving job performance, even though solicited by the company, seldom lead to any changes other than trivial ones.

Although this gap between the ideal and the real is commonplace in social life, it still has distinctive effects on the machinist's job strategy. In order to preserve and improve one's position in the company, the machinist must play not only by all the formal, published rules – low absenteeism, consistently high production, infrequent scrapping of parts, wrecking of tools and injuries to self – but also by the unwritten rules of the 'good German', the organisation man, the team player. Since unwritten rules are unpublished, they can be learned most readily by participation in the subtle formations of social cliques and political factions.

In other words, the informal work groups reported in the work-place literature serve a purpose beyond the already significant ones of satisfying emotional needs, providing on-the-job training and rationing output. The machinist can, as some do, choose not to affiliate with any formation and still possibly survive as an employee in the shop. Such a choice, however, means only that the machinist is a faction of one, deprived of the benefits of affiliation with a larger formation. In particular, the machinist who chooses the role of social satellite forsakes the formation's cooperative interpretation of the shop's latest rumours and events. That interpretation, in turn, provides an informed basis upon which to develop a personal strategy within the boundaries of the company game.

To take a concrete example: the company may announce that it will begin manufacturing a new product line, or that it will manufacture an existing line with new machines and methods. As a consequence, the company announces new openings for internal recruitment. From the point of view of the individual machinist, the decision whether or not to apply is not necessarily straightforward. The company's new venture could fail miserably, with much of the blame falling on the production workers' shoulders. Another worker might have filled the position the machinist left behind. The new machines or methods might demand specific skills the machinist lacks, so journeyman status might revert temporarily yet still embarrassingly to that of apprentice. Converse possibilities hold as well, of course. The new line might become the company's only one within a few years.[8] These possibilities are among those for which a competent formation provides helpful guidance.

Obviously, the machinist must not only decide whether or not to join a formation, but also which formation to join. Joining one which is, or soon will be, the last refuge of those who are scoundrels in the company's view would defeat the whole purpose of affiliation with a formation. On the other hand, failure to affiliate with a formation which currently counts company pariahs among its membership, but will shortly become dominant, can also be a disastrous choice. Rather than belabour the obvious point and continue to elaborate the tricky political decisions a machinist must make on a daily basis, let the case

rest here that machine-shop politics are as complex, and as simple, as those of any modern organisation: say, a supreme court or a university.

Thus we have not one but two organisations of production in the capitalist machine shop. In one, that idealised in business school text-books, the company's functional assignments of managerial respon-sibilities and work roles result in minimised costs, maximised profits and manipulated morale. In the other, generated by the contradictions within the first and realised in the daily work lives of company employees, hypocritical assertions of personal and organisational goals coexist in tension with the more accurate attitudes adopted and social formations joined by the workers.

This dual organisation of production – one abstract, yet powerful in the formal obedience it demands; the other human, yet weak in its subterranean status – has a number of consequences for ways of life on the shop floor. The company cannot eliminate social cliques and political factions, for its own, contradictory policies generate them. Yet the company cannot view them with benign indifference either, because their existence poses a continual threat to work discipline and therefore profits.

What are those ways of life, and how do they work themselves out in the context of the dual organisation of production? Do these folkways show, as intimated at the outset of this essay, that cultural patterns per-sist despite capitalist exploitation; indeed, even play a critical role in the struggle against exploitation?

Running production

For present purposes, it will be helpful to classify machine tools into four general categories, and then focus on one as a paradigm of how production machining is done.[9] There are shapers, in which a cutting tool moves reciprocally while the material remains stationary during a cut. There are planes, in which the material reciprocates while the tool remains stationary. There are mills, drills and grinders, in which the tool turns on its axis while the material moves in a straight or curved line against the tool. There are lathes, in which the material turns on its axis while the tool moves against it.

In one type of production lathe, inside a large box with sliding doors and plexiglass windows, each side of a vertically aligned, hexagonal tur-ret holds one or more tools. The turret rotates to each side sequentially, then moves forward against the material, held in a chuck by three jaws under air pressure and turning anywhere from a few to several hundred revolutions per minute. When the machine is in operation, the jaws pop open, spreading wide with a flatulent sound. The operator inserts the cylindrical material, stabs the 'Close Jaws' button and concentrates on keeping fingers clear of the instantaneously converging jaws. Then the

operator slides the door shut, hits the 'Start Cycle' button, stands back and hopes for the best.[10] The chuck starts spinning, the turret moves forward horizontally with the plane of the current side on the axis of the chuck and the part, coolant gushes out of hoses on to the part and the cutting tool begins to penetrate the metal.

The 'best' means that the part does not fly out of the jaws, the cycle started on the correct side of the turret and none of the cutting tools breaks before it suffers maximum wear and is replaced. Barring such contingencies, the operator can remove the part and insert another before the time period allowed for the operation has elapsed. 'Best' also means that the operator can maintain a rhythm, which merges sight, sound, smell and bodily mechanics with the machine. They merge literally and not figuratively: worker and machine do not become tentative extensions of one another, they become one. This rhythm enables the machinist to overcome Benjamin's sad prophecy. He or she can meet production rates, yet maintain safety and quality.

'Worst' means the machine is down and not producing for a time, while a finger is being stitched, a wrecked machine is being repaired, a tool is being sharpened, replaced or repositioned, or the tool feeds and spindle speeds are being adjusted.

Foremen cruise the floor continuously. They watch for operators away from their machines, at toilets, water fountains, other operators' machines (quite often, consulting on the best way to do a job) or the tool crib. They also watch for operators who replace worn tools too soon, set at less than maximum the rates at which tools are fed into turning metal or spend time making fine adjustments of tools in order to produce parts better than the print (or, at least, final inspection and sales) demands.

Although this description may sound prosaic, there is nevertheless something ineluctably sensual and violent about metal-cutting. Pieces ripped from the earth's gut, forged in fires that would make Vulcan blush, mounted in Promethean shackles, cajoled, caressed and torn into new shapes by an insatiable seducer-lover-rapist, represent fundamentally the attitude of industrial civilisation towards the organic world. The attitude has different aspects. We can see it as predisposed towards acts of love, with no deliberate result in mind other than pleasure; or towards acts of rape, assertions of power and violence. When the latter aspect dominates the industrial attitude, an object — whether a female, a worker or a piece of iron — which does not sell for a profit in its natural state becomes useful only to the extent that it can be remade into a commodity for market, a thing that fits into the quantifiable categories of exchange.

The metal worker, however, is no mere victim of this attitude. Even the well-meaning machinist shares complicity in exploitative industry. At the most immediate level, the machinist shares the pleasure of

mastery over the organic world. We are so used to understanding the modern worker and his distant ancestors as merely vague reflections of one another that we forget that they do essentially the same thing for essentially the same reason. They both 'make a living' by acting on the material world and its correlative social relations; and both try to extract some sensuous satisfaction and cultural meaning from doing so. Despite the intervention of capitalist production, the machinist as a sensuous, living human is the one who rapes and kills the metal.[11] For the capitalist rewards the machinist not only with wages, but also with access to a primeval experience. US machinists, when asked what they do for a living, will often respond with no little self-satisfaction, 'I cut iron.'

In short, the machinist does the capitalist's dirty work for him; and receives not only wages in exchange, but also direct, sensual participation in remaking the material world from what it was when originally available to us as a species.

This view of the production process is more than a romantic metaphor with meaning only at the level of allegory. The capitalist has the advantage of being able to offer the skilled, industrial worker the experience of work as a primeval passion play, but that portrayal of work has another edge, one not so advantageous to the capitalist. For it presumes a worker who works for something more than wages. In other words, the politics of the shop floor and the primeval action of metal-cutting complicate the capitalist's already difficult task of disciplining the work force in ways consistent with the logic of profit. Workers bring their capacity for social relations with one another and their organic relations to the material world with them everywhere, even into the rationalised and mechanised world of the factory.

Los Obreros

What culture do Chicanos bring with them into the modern factory? This question would have been far more difficult for an Anglo to answer only a few decades ago. Outside their own community, Chicano culture went almost unacknowledged until the 1960s. Thanks to the protean efforts of dedicated scholars and activists, however, the view of those looking in from the outside has improved. Like the post-revolutionary generation of Mexican scholars in the 1920s and 1930s, Chicano intellectuals have consciously constructed a clarified group identity.[12]

We know, for example, that the culture of the second oldest race in the US has an ancient history of mythic proportions. The presumption has crumbled that Mexican Americans were a hybrid of Spanish and Native American, a hybrid bedded in the soil of another nation. It turns out, ironically, that they are the descendants of those Native Americans who

originally occupied the land, Aztlan, on which the Chicanos now live. They are neither a mestizo race, being predominantly Indian, nor are they interlopers within manifestly destined borders. They had, for example, settled the valley of the upper Rio Grande in New Mexico a generation before the Pilgrims arrived at Plymouth Rock.

Further, their culture is not a static, encumbering inheritance. Instead, it self-consciously renews itself, relying on its rich heritage and internal diversity. In this task, they have the advantages of their own struggles, the examples of the struggles of Latin American revolutionists, the length and artificiality of the border between Mexico and the United States and their own numbers.[13] Since the First World War, they have comprised the US's single largest supply of foreign labour, and perhaps the largest single international flow of workers in the same period. Except for the forced repatriations of the Depression, that flow has continued to increase.[14] In fact, the natural lines and contours of this continent run north and south, not east and west. The movement 'north from Mexico' is older and more continuous than that from east to west.[15]

This is a culture with all the usual essentials: cuisine, medicine, dress, language, rituals, myths, symbols, kinship patterns, dominant values. Most significantly for this essay, the culture includes a vigorous tradition of resistance, and 'almost habitual striving for equality and justice'.[16] Indeed, to the extent that there has been an enduring workers' movement in the south-western US, it has been overwhelmingly a Chicano movement.[17]

Unfortunately, a strong tradition of resistance implies a long history of oppression, and of other responses to it, such as accommodation. Thus, students of Mexican character have taken their own people to task for such imputed traits as a resignation to death's inevitability, a consequent disregard for life's fleeting temporality, a mystified adulation of power and a fractured, incomplete self-identity.[18] Woven together in the collective pysche, these traits result in seemingly inexhaustible endurance, followed abruptly by explosive retaliation.

For almost a century and a half, Anglos have held legal power in the south-western US. Under their rule, the enduring side of Chicanismo has manifested itself in a variety of ways: generally and abstractly, mutual support in the daily confrontations with immediate adversity. Chicanos also responded with the productive labour and most of the technology that quite literally built the economic infrastructure of the south-west: that is, the mines, farms and ranches, roads and railroads. Although the pathology of Anglo racism, well honed on blacks and Native Americans, wounded the Chicano community deeply, over the generations they have reconstructed the organised social life essential not only for the support of rebels, but also for the restraint of accommodationists.[19] In fact, the retaliations have been commensurate

with the responses. Rooted in the *mutualistas* of Mexico City in the 1850s,[20] Chicano workers have stood fast from the 1857 Ox Cart war in San Antonio to the Phelps Dodge copper strike today.

Yet, despite all that has been said and will be said about Chicanismo, there is, of course, no syncretic, undifferentiated Chicano culture. Several scholars note pointedly that the Aztecs, themselves interlopers, can hardly be said to have successfully consolidated their hold on the Central Valley, given the cooperation Cortes received from several other tribes. In Mexico today, local and regional identifications still often outweigh the national.[21] The institutionalised revolution, despite its promise of a coherent, national identity, defaulted on the last of its credit in the massacre at the Plaza de Tlatelolco in 1968.[22]

We need to understand a culture as a large, fluid repertoire from which conscious and unconscious choices are made. As much as individuals might embrace their own cultures, they will inevitably be frustrated. For if the culture is alive and developing, it remains by definition an incomplete project, and therefore not precisely applicable to all situations. Conversely, as much as individuals might try to shed their culture like fouled clothing, it will stick to them, as a nagging, Jungian memory or as the deep structures of the native tongue.

Full circle

Thus, there can be no unequivocal validation of the story-lines suggested at the outset of this essay. For example, Paz argues that the Mexican is opposed to the capitalist conception of work as an impersonal action repeated in equal and empty portions of time.

> The Mexican works slowly and carefully; he loves the completed work and each of the details that make it up; and his innate good taste is an ancient heritage ... This does not mean that the Mexican is incapable of being converted into what is called a 'good worker'. It is only a question of time.[23]

How far has this conversion proceeded? In order to answer tentatively that and other questions raised in this essay, I posed those questions to four Chicano machinists with whom I have worked.

Two years had passed since I left the shop in which three of my former co-workers – Manuel, David, and Jesse – still worked. A fourth, Ernest, had left shortly after I did. All of us had started for the company at about the same time, four years ago.

The company we all had in common is modern in most conventional senses. It is an international organisation, making sophisticated equipment sold on a world market to industries extracting raw materials. It has been highly profitable for much of the several decades in which it has existed. It employs the most technologically advanced machine

tools. Its personnel policies are not paternalistic, yet they are very solicitous towards worker morale.

In lengthy conversations with each of the four machinists, I asked them for comment on the argument of this essay. Each agreed with the essentials of my account of life on the shop floor. They agreed with the distinction between the general and production machinist; with the inherent difficulties of supervision, and their causes; with the gap between the ideal and actual in work standards and safety; and with the necessity for political formations outside the company's formal organisation of production.

Manuel, David, and Jesse – obviously survivors in ways that Ernest and I were not – offered detailed accounts of the company's recent history. They recalled the company's reorganisation in response to market decline and renewal, and the personal fates of individuals, ranking from executives to production workers, during this tortuous process.

Their responses to questions about Chicano culture were much more varied. Manuel learned the trade in Monterrey, where he was a foreman for eleven years. He conceded that there was, perhaps, a greater emphasis on quality in the Monterrey shops, but attributed that to the higher degree of competition still present in Mexican metal-working. Here, he takes great pride in his consistent production of quality parts, and uses argument to resist supervisory pressure to increase his quantity. That is, he responds to such pressure by noting that his attendance is reliable, his rejection rate is low and his record shows no wrecked machines. (The latter is a common and very expensive event in the shop's computerised, numerically controlled section.)

Manuel thinks occasionally of returning to Mexico, but economic uncertainties there and family responsibilities here have prolonged that decision. He continues to value such traditions as *compadrazgo*, but as 'the real thing, not an excuse for socialising'. He and his wife speak English about one-half of the time, and he believes that English fluency is very important for his children – 'They get enough Spanish at home.'

David regards his Spanish as an important legacy, but is not concerned that his daughters know only a few words in that language. He is not aware of any particular aspect of Chicano culture which imparts to him an instinct of workmanship. (His work involves the most highly skilled type of production machining in the shop.) Instead, like Manuel, he attributes that responsibility to his father, who convinced him that survival with dignity demands a lifetime of hard work. David, in fact, expresses gratitude to the company, not only for its relatively high wages (within the context of the local market for machinists), but also for its financial and psychological encouragement of his part-time college studies.

Yet, despite his accommodation to the demands of industrial production, David still needs a psychological strategy for confronting the

dynamics of the shop floor. For him, as for so many workers, that strategy relies on his family's photographs, attached to the inside, top cover of his tool box. 'When I get depressed, I look at my girls' pictures, and it keeps me going.'

Jesse, too, would not attribute his pride of craft to Chicano culture, although he takes pride in his ethnicity. He regards his concern for quality as an inherent feature of his individuality. 'When I make them, I make them to last, no matter what anyone tells me to do.' This pride can intersect with more pragmatic concerns, and produce one of the more well-documented forms of worker resistance, the slow-down. Jesse updated me on the most recent struggle of this type. A promised bonus for high production never materialised, so the machinists in his section slowed their weekly output from nearly 100 per cent of the company's rate down to nearly 60 per cent. They kept it there despite the frantic inquiries of supervisors and managers, until the bonus appeared. Then they brought it up again.

After two years out of the shop, Ernest is about to complete a junior-college degree in nursing. He left the shop after a sincere and finally unsuccessful effort to accommodate himself to production discipline. In his mind, those efforts did not win the carrots of substantial wage increases and titular promotion (from 'machine operator' to 'production machinist') because he had become identified as a mild yet persistent critic of company policies. Consequently, no matter how well he met or exceeded the company's rates, his efforts amounted to 'pissing in the wind'. He had come to the shop after leaving the military. There he had developed a strong interest in psychiatric nursing, but came to realise that the opportunities to pursue this interest were ambiguous at best. 'I knew I was being used – I don't know a better word for it – oppressed. The company and the trade were a way out to me, even though my family saw it as a step down. Then I realised I was in the same situation all over again.'

He drew an analogy between his life's experience so far and the historical experience, mentioned earlier in this essay, of Chicanos in the south-western US. In the 1830s and subsequently, Anglo military adventures and legal chicanery initially dispossessed Chicanos of their territory. Nevertheless, their social control of their communities persisted. Ultimately, however, the powerful appeal of capital and corporate organisation produced the consolidation of Anglo rule and Chicano accommodation to it. The deal was deceptive, of course: labour power and political accommodation did not buy either independent development or assimilation into the presumably successful Anglo society.

So Ernest returned to school and nursing, not with grand expectations, but in search of superior terrain from which to continue the struggle.

Conclusion

In Paz's terms, these four machinists are 'good workers', but not in the capitalist conception of labour as impersonal actions repeated in empty and equal portions of time. They are good workers not because of but in spite of the capitalist organisation of production.

Each of them, like each of us, must enter daily the dialectic of resistance and accommodation, and struggle for a livable position within it. In order to do so, they must locate themselves in a self-conscious network of mind and body, of machine, material and blueprint, and of the formal and informal organisations of production. While their aboriginal culture does not appear to have imparted to them a consciously selected reference point which guides those moments of choice favouring resistance, they still maintain a pride in their heritage that contributes to their self-identities. In turn, such identity – a labour of their people's history and an ensemble of their current social relations – composes the subjectivity that willingly yet unwillingly lends itself to the processes of capital accumulation and surplus absorption.

What Thompson calls 'the problem of finding an adequate framework for a politics of production' cannot be solved here.[24] What Bergquist calls the creative telling of labour's story, in which labour is the protagonist at the heart of modern world history, will take some time.[25] If, however, we do this work slowly, carefully, and lovingly, and if we distribute its results to its rightful owners, the beast may yet suffer a fatal attack.

References

1   See, for example, Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago, 1978), especially Chapters 3 and 6. See also, Juan Gomez-Quinones, *On Culture* (UCLA Chicano Studies Center Publications, 1977).

2   Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York, 1977), p. 283.

3   Whether or not the following description and analysis would apply as well to non-capitalist machine shops must depend on other research. For some suggestive considerations, however, see Paul Thompson, *The Nature of Work* (London, 1983), pp. 216-24. For discussions of a broader context within which to locate such considerations, see Charles Bergquist(ed.), *Labor in the Capitalist World-Economy* (Beverly Hills, 1984).

4   This is only a phenomenal account, that is, one of how the process seems to work to many of its participants. As a practical matter, of course, most workers experience daily the empirical reality of accomplishing production in spite of company organisation.

5   See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, (New York, 1962), pp. 74-5.

6   This is not to say, incidentally, that markets are autonomous phenomena, existing only ethereally. Although they seem to move increasingly beyond human control, their contours are shaped, however incompetently, selfishly or myopically, by the human captains of industry and finance. Indeed, markets themselves are residues of earlier decisions, including decisions to emphasise some technologies and organisational forms rather than others, made by members of ruling classes. Among the

facts which demonstrate the manipulation of markets, perhaps none are clearer than the steady and cyclically feverish consolidation of already profitable companies. In other words, a profitable company might not persist if a still more profitable company finds it a vulnerable and attractive target for acquisition.

7   David Noble, *America by Design* (New York, 1977), pp. 258-9.
8   These same points could also be developed in the context of other choices made by the machinist. For example, he or she might have to decide how to relate to a union organising drive, or a rank-and-file uprising within the union. In this sense, a union is only another formation, but a unique one in the sense that the open expression of opposition to the company is not only expected and tolerated, but perhaps even encouraged.
9   There are, of course, other types which fall between or straddle the four categories, as well as new technologies continually developing, 'constantly revolutionising the instruments of production'. For example, precision casting techniques reduce or eliminate the use of cutting tools made from metal.
10 Incidentally, this is the moment of greatest danger when operating such 'automatic' machines, and especially when operating 'computer numerically controlled' machines. When operating a conventional machine, the worker controls the approach of material and tool, even when using rapid feed levers. With automatics and CNCs, the approach is usually too rapid to permit second thoughts.
11 See Kai T. Erikson, *Everything in Its Path* (New York, 1976), p. 130, on the psychic geography of Appalachian miners.
12 Henry C. Schmidt, *The Roots of 'Lo Mexicano': self and society in Mexican thought, 1900-1934* (College Station, 1978).
13 The border is indeed porous, but crossing is no cakewalk. See John Davidson, *The Long Road North* (Garden City, NY, 1979).
14 Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow* (Albuquerque, 1979), p. 1.
15 Carey MacWilliams, *North from Mexico* (New York, 1968,1949), pp. 303-4.
16 James Diego Vigil, *From Indians to Chicanos* (St. Louis, 1980), p. 221.
17 The grand qualifications on this assertion are, of course, the Western Federation of Miners and the Wobblies. Nevertheless, both organisations are more accurately identified with the northern tier of the south-west. Lesser qualifications which should be considered are the California longshoremen and Texas railroad workers. See James C. Foster *American Labor in the Southwest* (Tucson, 1982).
18 Octavio Paz, *The Other Mexico: critique of the pyramid* (New York, 1972); *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1961).
19 Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest* (South Bend, 1979); Arnoldo DeLeon, *They Called Them Greasers* (Austin, Texas, 1983); Arnoldo DeLeon, *The Tejano Community, 1836-1900* (Albuquerque, 1982); Robert J. Rosenbaum, *Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest* (Austin, 1981); Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States* (Berkeley, 1932; New York, 1970), Vol. II.
20 Rodolfo Acuna, *Occupied America* (New York, 1981, 2nd. ed.), p. 190-91.
21 Thomas Benjamin and William McNellie, *Other Mexicos* (Albuquerque, 1984). For the socio-economic disparities among subregions on the US side of the border, see Niles Hansen, *The Border Economy* (Austin, 1981). *Chicanismo* itself is not a widely accepted concept among south-western Hispanics.
22 Paz, *Pyramid,* op. cit.; Donald Hodges and Ross Gandy, *Mexico, 1910-1982: Reform or Revolution?* (London, 1983). Equally apposite to this issue of cultural complexity, but at the more immediate level of individuals and their language usage, is George C. Barker, *Social Functions of Language in a Mexican-American Community* (Tucson, 1972, originally published in 1947).
23 Paz, *Labyrinth*, op.cit. pp. 69-70.
24 Thompson, op.cit., p. 236.
25 Bergquist, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

Notes and documents

Latino caucuses in US labour unions

What effect do undocumented Latin American immigrant workers have on US workers, in the workplace and within their unions? Leaders of the most important US unions and union federations, like the AFL-CIO, which represents 13 million workers, and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), which represents 1.9 million, respond to this question by accusing immigrant workers of (a) weakening the unions and effectively deteriorating the working conditions and wage levels for North American workers; and (b) replacing US workers, or causing unemployment.

The clearest and crudest expression of this ideology was advanced by Jackie Presser, International President of the Teamsters:

> Illegal immigrants represent one of the most serious problems facing the nation; Mexicans, Haitians, etc. threaten our national security and their unwanted presence provokes an explosive situation. We cannot continue to tolerate the massive influx of immigrants to this country.[1]

Most union leaders have determined, with the US government, that it is necessary to stop labour immigration to the country. That is why they supported the legislative proposal on immigration control and reform — the Simpson-Mazzoli Bill — from the beginning. It wasn't until minutes before the bill was brought before the House of Representatives for a vote that union leaders withdrew their support — too late, unfortunately — arguing that the proposed 'guest worker' programme was unacceptable.

It is a premise of this paper that employers have consistently attempted to use the immigrant labour force to discipline US workers and to weaken their unions, as well as to avoid paying economic and social benefits achieved by the unions after years of struggle. In the last

decade, immigrant labour has been particularly attractive to many employers, representing one means of softening the blows of the present crisis. On the other hand, such a premise must not lead us erroneously to lay responsibility for this on the immigrants themselves, as does much of the union leadership.

As is increasingly acknowledged by the unions themselves, the labour movement in the US is undergoing a period of deterioration. According to the Bureau of National Affairs, in 1982 (the last year for which statistics are available) only 17.9 per cent of the labour force was unionised. The ability of the unions to fulfill their own stated goals is presently in question. The unions' decomposition is evidenced by the corruption of much of the union leadership at all levels; the lack of communication between leadership and rank and file, and the unions' loss of moral and political strength, not only with respect to employers but also in the eyes of their members and society at large.

The Latino caucuses have emerged as an alternative to present union policies, but also as a means of seeking a racial representation within the unions, fighting against racial oppression and discrimination in both the workplace and the unions; and for the right to preserve Latin American language and culture at work and within the union.

Immigrant workers and the US labour force
The labour forces of the three industries considered in the case studies here* were, until the early 1950s, largely made up of native white workers, though 20 per cent were native blacks and 10 per cent other nationalities. Today, in each case, the presence of the Latin American labour force (especially Mexican immigrants) is important, and sometimes essential. In Local 2 of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders Union, almost 25 per cent of the workers are Latin American immigrants; in Local 912 of the IBT (food processing industry), 80 per cent of the workers are Latin American (20 per cent Chicanos), and 60 per cent of Local 645 UAW workers are Latinos (20 per cent are Chicanos).

With the expansion of industry from the 1950s until the early 1970s, US whites and blacks, though mainly the former, migrated to other industries where they were able to find jobs with higher rates of pay and better working conditions. This trend left two of the industries under discussion (food processing and hotels and restaurants) with a significant number of vacancies to fill. Undocumented workers were attracted to these industries and contracted to fill the unwanted jobs. Note that in

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* Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union, Local 2, San Francisco; International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Local 912, Watsonville, California; United Automobile Workers, Local 645, Los Angeles.

contrast to Jackie Presser's reference to 'unwanted' immigrant workers, it was the jobs themselves that were not wanted.

The third industry under consideration here, the automobile, represents the other side of the coin. Because the salaries and working conditions in this sector have been among the best, between the 1950s and the mid-1970s there were very few vacant jobs which could have been filled by undocumented workers. But at the end of the 1970s, the crisis in that industry and growing international competition meant that the US industry had to restructure itself via modernisation and automation, lowering of salaries and working conditions, moving industrial sites to southern and south-western regions of the US and to other areas of the world, and also through contracting cheap and flexible labour, that is, immigrant workers. This last measure was particularly important in the Los Angeles area, while the others were more significant nationally. In the last six years, approximately 1.5 million workers have been laid off by the automobile industry and related/satellite industries as a result of modernisation and off-shore relocations. (Because of its proximity and the cheap, available labour it boasts, Mexico has been one of the most important recipients of the relocated auto plants.)

Thus the role that immigrant labour plays in a given industry is determined by the needs of that industry. In the first cases, it was the scarcity of labour which led employers to seek foreign labour, while in the latter, international competition and the economic crisis have made immigrant workers more attractive, as one more means of cushioning against the effects of the crisis.

Local 2, San Francisco, California

The Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, which has 400,000 members in the US, is the union which perhaps best expresses the contradictions which face the US labour movement with respect to the immigrant labour force. Ever since the union's founding ninety-three years ago, the immigrant labour force has played an important role in the industry. At the union's last national convention, in 1981, General President Edward T. Hanley observed: 'Recent studies reveal that hotels, restaurants and bars, along with bakeries, grocery stores, canneries, and food processing plants account for the jobs of over a fifth of the so-called illegals.'[2]

The issue of immigrant workers was a major point of debate during this convention. According to Hanley, the US and its labour force have been historically composed of European immigrants, described by him as 'natural leaders in the long struggle to establish collective bargaining in this country'. For years, 'the trade unions of the day were the leading voices in the support of a policy of open immigration', but times have changed and now 'they (the undocumented) come into an economy

which is not expanding as it once did'.

There are 17,000 workers organised in Local 2 of the Hotel Restaurant Employees and Bartenders Union of San Francisco. Sixty-seven per cent of these workers are ethnic minorities: Asians, Blacks and Latinos. It is San Francisco's most important union. Despite the fact that a quarter of Local 2's members are Latinos, Latinos are not represented on the executive committee.

Ninety per cent of the Latino workers cannot speak or read English. Nevertheless, until 1980, union meetings, flyers and the contract itself were conducted or written only in English, which of course severely limited the participation of Latinos. In 1980, Latino union members founded the group 'Latinos Unidos' to support the 1980 hotel strike and to request that the union hold bilingual meetings or meetings in Spanish, and translate the informational flyers and the contract into Spanish. The leadership consented, but not without reluctance. The new gains made possible an impressive increase in the participation of Latino workers in union life.

The leaders of Latinos Unidos defined it from the beginning as a component group of Local 2, with the objective of defending the racial rights of Latinos within the union. Latinos Unidos supported the union in general, and was not seen by its leaders or members as a group either outside of or opposed to the union. But Local 2 leaders didn't see Latinos Unidos the same way. Rather, they characterised it as a separatist group, with political aims that were opposed to those of the union. From the beginning, Local 2 leadership attempted to obstruct the activities of Latinos Unidos.

Latinos Unidos' first test was the period of negotiations and the strike of 1980. The group's participation was exemplary, as the press of that period reveals in its coverage of picket-lines, demonstrations and declarations of Local 2 leaders on the strike. Even though the majority of Latinos Unidos were opposed to the decisions taken by the direction of Local 2, they never withdrew their support, nor did they carry out activities outside the union. The leadership, however, adopted an ambivalent attitude in the face of its union's struggles. Months before the period of negotiations of 1980, the membership agreed to create a strike fund. The leadership never implemented the decision. The leadership supported the decision to strike, but a week later recommended that the rank and file accept the employer's proposals. Finally, after a month, the membership accepted the proposals, despite the fact that many of the issues around which the strike had erupted – worsening working conditions, racism and discrimination on the job – were not seriously addressed.

Once the strike was concluded, Latinos Unidos' first action was to demand that Local 2 translate the new contract into Spanish and that it enforce the affirmative action provisions which were loosely referred to

in the contract (i.e., to help the Latino workers with promotions and ensure respect for their seniority and merits achieved on the job). When it became clear that the union leadership was not responding to their petitions, the Latinos began to act alone. They translated a summary of the contract and other union news into Spanish, using their own funds, collected through donations of their members, and the remittances of some social-cultural activities which they had organised.

Besides the translations, the group began to publish a bulletin in which concrete cases of Latino workers who were having problems with their employers, the Migra* or the union, were discussed. All this allowed Latinos Unidos to consolidate and increase its influence amongst Latinos. Faced with the increasing strength of the group and realising that it was no longer possible to ignore it, union leaders made a change in strategy in order to undermine Latinos Unidos' position. Instead of confrontation, the union welcomed Latinos, aiding them with their complaints and defending them in their conflicts with employers and the Migra.

But at the same time, the secretary-general of Local 2, Charles Lamb, as he later admitted in an interview, hired another Latino to work full-time for the union, wooing and organising Latino members. The union translated the entire contract into Spanish, along with informational flyers; they established regular meetings for Latino members wherein particular Latino concerns were discussed and resolved. This situation made it difficult for Latinos Unidos to justify its existence, as there now existed an official union organisation and specific procedures to resolve Latinos' problems. Latinos Unidos began to appear as an extra-official organisation, at odds with the union.

According to Lamb, the union does 'not need outside groups. The best way to influence the union is to participate in its activities, not to work outside; anyone may become a union leader. Whoever is respected by the rank and file can be elected to one of the decision-making organs and to work from within. That is why we contracted Jaime Flores to organize our Latino members. Now that they are organized and defended, there is no reason for Latinos Unidos to exist.'

However, Lamb, like the majority of union leaders, has not understood the fundamental problem. Latinos, like other minorities, have problems particular to themselves which must be resolved in specific ways. And in order to resolve them, it is important that Latinos have the right to meet and organise – within the union but at the same same time separately – so that they may discuss issues in their native language, which allows them to communicate most effectively and to grow in self-confidence. And, of course, they must have their

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* The US Immigration and Naturalization Service.

representatives who serve as mediators between Latino members and the union, or between members and their employer.

It's not that we don't see the necessity and importance of Latinos learning to communicate in English, but while this is not the case for whatever reasons – economic, educational, cultural, etc. (it is not the purpose of this essay to detail the causes) – they ought to have not only the right and the liberty to organise themselves separately, but the union ought to promote and assist this idea. For a while, a group existed within the union which had these characteristics, but only so long as it took for Latinos Unidos to disappear.

Once the ghost of Latinos Unidos disappeared, the Latino meetings, organised by the leadership of the union, became purely information sessions about the decisions of the union, or to ask the members to vote in favour of proposals sponsored by Charles Lamb's contingent, as opposed to other currents within the union. Attendance by Latinos at the meetings began slowly to decline, until the meetings practically disappeared altogether, because Latinos no longer felt that they were taken seriously.

In this manner participation by Latinos in the union has been debilitated. Now their participation is more passive; fewer people participate in the general meetings of the union; and they vote as the union suggests, but many times they don't know why. Although they still fight in the workplace for observance of the provisions of the contract, they are now not an organised and militant force, a pillar of support for the union.

But the idea of Latinos Unidos has not died in Local 2. It is quite possible that the group will reappear before long and it is hoped that the leadership of the union, as well as of Latinos Unidos, will have benefitted from past experience.

Teamsters, Local 912, Watsonville, California

Local 912 has 7,000 workers organised in the food-processing industry in Salinas Valley, California, the majority of them Mexican immigrants who do not speak English, although until recently all meetings were conducted in English, with the result that few Latinos participated in union activities. Local 912 was founded in 1952. Since then, only three elections have been held. The first was when the Local was created, and gave Richard King the presidency. The second allowed King to assume the formal power of the secretary-treasurer's position, which he had held informally for quite some time. The third election, in 1982 (thirty years after the Local's founding), was held as a result of pressures exerted by the opposition group, the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), and resulted in the formation of the Caucus Latino Rebelde. Since its inception, the Local was atrophied, bound and controlled by a bureaucracy – for at that time the national union was already

bureaucratised and literally controlled by a mafia. Because of its history, the union is now considered to be the most anti-democratic and bureaucratically controlled in the US.

A union official who does not work in a factory, who does not feel the increasing rate of production work, who does not endure the despotism, racism, and discrimination of the foremen, who has a salary three or more times that of the workers, and who interacts socially with the owners, administrators and supervisors more than with the workers, has in real life more in common with the owners and administrators; to this person, the requests of the owners seem more rational than those of the workers. And so, on the occasion of the collective work contract revision of 1982, when the owners proposed to freeze salaries, reduce the salaries of the temporary workers (who were the majority of workers and predominantly Mexican) and take back certain fringe benefits, the immediate reaction of the union leadership was to ask its members to accept the company's proposal, arguing that the company was losing money and was about to close its doors. The Mexican workers and the TDU responded by saying that they had heard this kind of story before, and by using the same sources of information they showed that in one of the most inportant of the company's plants, Green Giant, earnings had increased, not decreased. The union leadership had to resort to a trick to make the workers accept the contract proposal. Instead of voting in the union local's building in the presence of all the workers, voting took place in each factory during work hours and in the presence of the foremen and administrators.

Since the Local was established, the executive committee has always been controlled by whites, in spite of the fact that they represent the smallest minority. The Mexican workers, although they are the majority, have never been represented nor have they participated in the nomination of officials. Furthermore, the business agents and shop stewards have always been designated directly by secretary-treasurer Richard King. In 1982, the annual salaries of the King family (Richard and his wife, who is his secretary) were $85, 551. Meanwhile, the average salary of a union worker was approximately $15,000. In this same year, the Local's income, coming from union dues and other sources, was $872,000 of which $253,000 was sent to the national union, $200,000 was spent on Local officials' salaries, and as for the rest, $420,000, none of the workers knows what it was spent on.[3] In that same period, during the process of negotiating the new labour contract, a Mexican immigrant worker asked the union officials: 'How much money have you spent to organise the members to fight for a better contract?' Union President Fred Heinon responded: 'I don't know, the Union is broke. TDU has more money.'

The 1982 union elections were, in fact, the first test of strength between the union bureaucracy and the TDU. King retained his

manipulative control over the election process, and although the vote was close – with 56 per cent in favour and 44 per cent for the TDU – he was able to maintain his power. What took place? Only 2,000 of the 7,000 members voted – in other words, only 28 per cent of the membership voted, due to the fact that the elections were held in December which is the month when there are the least number of workers at the plant; it is the month that production is lowest, the time of lay-offs and vacations. It is also the time that the Mexican immigrant workers use to visit their families in Mexico. The election was done through the mail, sent at the third-class rate, with the result that the majority of workers didn't receive their ballot; sometimes, the officials deliberately did not send them to their opponents. In other situations, the undocumented workers had not given an address for fear of being tracked down and deported by the Migra. Lastly, close to 300 workers who supported TDU were not registered, it being argued that they didn't have the right to vote. The TDU and the Caucus Latino Rebelde suffered a set-back due to losses in the election, but the majority understood that it hadn't been a democratic process to begin with and the majority of the workers continue to support TDU.

Due to the organisation and efforts of the Mexican workers and the TDU, however, supervisory practices in the company have improved, union meetings are now bilingual, the contract is translated into Spanish, and Local 912 is now officially against the Simpson-Mazzoli bill.

Local 645, Los Angeles, California

Five thousand workers in the automobile industry are organised in Local 645. This union represents the counterpoint to the issue we are examining here. It is a union in which the workers of Latino origin are racially represented in the union leadership, as are the rest of the racial groups in the Local. The leadership is principally in the hands of Chicanos and Latino immigrants, which corresponds to the composition of the membership.

The racial make-up of the union leadership can also be felt in the prevailing atmosphere of the union local. It is a Chicano-Mexican atmosphere. The immigrant workers go to the union hall and feel at ease; they talk, argue, joke and sing freely in Spanish. This is in contrast to what occurs at other union locals, where in spite of the fact that the majority of the workers may be Spanish-speaking, the atmosphere there is foreign to them. They go to the union hall because of problems or to pay dues, but they feel like they're in an unfamiliar and hostile place which they leave as soon as possible.

In 1982-3, General Motors threatened either to close its assembly plant in Los Angeles, the last GM plant in California, or drastically to cut wages and working conditions. The workers, who were then

primarily Chicanos and Mexican immigrants, fought to the end to keep the plant from being closed – and won, keeping both their salaries and their jobs, and with them the jobs and salaries of other workers.

In 1978, workers at the Vogue-Coach factory, producers of motor homes, where 80 per cent of the workers were Latino immigrants, undertook a struggle for unionisation, for better wages and working conditions. During this period the Migra conducted three raids, deporting about 300 workers in each of the first two raids. With the help of Local 645, there weren't any deportations the third time. And so, in the end, in spite of the Migra and with the support of Local 645, the workers were able to unionise and to get better working conditions and salaries.

A similar case presented itself during September 1984 at the Superior plant, an automobile parts producer where 1,200 workers, 90 per cent of them Latino immigrants, organised for unionisation with the support of Local 645. Once again, in spite of the threat of the Migra, the workers did win unionisation, along with a salary increase and improved benefits.

In September-October of 1984, during negotiations for the new contract between the auto workers' union and General Motors and the Ford Company, the two companies proposed a wage freeze and no job security. The members of Local 645 were the first to vote against these concessions and, furthermore, demanded job security, improved working conditions and scheduling, as well as respect for seniority. 15 September 1984, the last day of the old contract, was also the first of the days that the red and black banners were put up, and when the union international leadership was pressured not to accept concessions.

Conclusion
We can see that the Mexican workers are experiencing low wages and poor working conditions, as well as a lack of unions, or weak unions and hostility from them. The participation of immigrant workers within the unions given their particular circumstances of illegality, language and culture, is not a problem that should be resolved by them alone or even basically by them; rather, it is a problem which fundamentally concerns the unions, who should make economic and human resources available for the purpose of activating the organising of these workers into the unions and also into Latino caucuses. The unions should start up meetings with Latino workers where they, in cooperation with the union, can be informed, can discuss and can reach decisions in regards to their problems. Contracts and informational bulletins should also be translated into Spanish.

The question of language is fundamental to the organising of Latino workers. If it isn't taken into account, it becomes impossible to organise them; it is essential that they know what is happening with the union,

that they know their rights and that they can express their ideas and concerns. None of this is possible via the official language, English, when 90 per cent of the Latino workers are not able to speak it and, in most cases, cannot understand it either. This is not to say that we don't see the necessity for the Spanish-speaking workers to learn to express themselves in English in order better to stand up for their rights. But this is a problem which they cannot resolve on an individual basis, whether for economic, educational, cultural or other reasons. In any case, it should be addressed collectively through the unions. This is the only way to prevent what has sometimes occurred: that the immigrant workers are used as scabs and unorganised labour to weaken the unions.

California   HECTOR RAMOS

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UK commentary

Beyond accountability: Labour and policing after the 1985 rebellions

Just as the government moved rapidly after the urban rebellions of 1981 to strengthen police powers, equipment and organisation to meet the threat of further disorders, the 1985 uprisings in Handsworth, Brixton and on the Broadwater Farm Estate in North London have led to a variety of new policing and public order measures. In London, Sir Kenneth Newman has put the public 'on notice' that plastic bullets and CS gas will be used against rioters in future, a move endorsed by the new Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd. Hurd later intervened to set up a central store of such weapons to be drawn on directly by provincial police forces, by-passing the opposition of local police authorities in several areas to their purchase and use. More recently, the Home Office has announced an increase of £52m in central spending on the police and a further addition of 2,000 officers to police-manpower levels. And it is reported that the Home Office is seeking to impose on mainland police forces a policy of deploying water cannon and armour-plated Land Rovers, frequently used in Northern Ireland for offensive charges against demonstrators and rioters.

These moves have been matched on the legislative front by a significant hardening of the proposals contained in the Public Order Bill now before Parliament. Already, the greatly increased police powers contained in the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act were due to come into force at the start of 1986. The new Public Order Bill provides for extensive controls by the police of political meetings and demonstrations, enabling them to ban on the spot the type of spontaneous protest that occurred in Brixton and at Broadwater Farm following the police shooting of Cherry Groce and the death of Cynthia Jarrett during a police raid. The Bill also establishes new statutory definitions and penalties for the offences of riot, violent disorder and affray, making these charges much easier for the police to impose and successfully prosecute in future. And, in a move first announced at the Tory Party conference immediately following the 1985 rebellions, Hurd abandoned previous Home Office caution and gave in to police pressure in agreeing to create a new offence of 'disorderly conduct', under which the police will be licensed to arrest anyone whose 'words and behaviour' they consider likely 'to harass, alarm and distress' another person. This is a virtual re-enactment of the old 'sus' law and, no matter how it may be qualified by Parliament, will be used by the police in a similar manner to harass black youth.

Labour's retreat on policing

But if the government has predictably conceded the political, legal and financial backing for a return to full, confrontational policing of the black community, then the Labour Party's response to the 1985 'riots' has been muted. This contrasts with 1981, when the uprisings of that year, coinciding with Labour's capture of several large urban authorities, provided a significant political impetus behind demands for greater police accountability and led councils such as the Greater London Council into important initiatives in this field, including support for local police monitoring groups, many of them based in the black community.

But ever since the advent of the present Labour leadership in 1983, national spokesmen have sought to distance themselves from the more radical proposals for police reform advocated by these local councils and groups. Instead, they have developed a more limited programme based on the establishment of formal channels of accountability of chief constables and other senior police to new, fully-elected local police authorities; the repeal of Tory laws on police powers and public order (without specific proposals for what will replace them); and greatly extended training for police recruits, particularly in human awareness.

At the same time, many in the Labour Party, anxious to steal a political advantage on 'law and order', have themselves begun campaigning around the high incidence of inner-city crime and the

ineffectiveness of Tory policing policies in dealing with it. They have argued instead for the setting up of crime prevention initiatives to be organised on a 'multi-agency' basis by local authorities, but still including police participation. It is hoped that, in the process of working with the elected police authorities and the community in this way, the police's own priorities can be transformed.

In effect, Labour Party policy is no longer addressed primarily to challenging police power per se but rather to reordering police priorities away from public order and towards crime prevention and control. The difficulty with this approach, on a political level, is that it moves some way towards accepting the Tory agenda for 'law and order' and places Labour spokesmen in open competition with their opponents in bidding up public anxieties about crime, with all the racist overtones that entails. Moreover, Labour's current policy, insofar as it relies on legal reforms and formal accountability to alter policing practices, seems to accept at face value the constitutional basis of police power and the supposed authority of chief constables over their forces. Certainly, without a strong line of command between senior officers and the police rank-and-file, it is difficult to see what practical effect formal accountability will have in reducing police abuses of the black community.

The contradictions of corporate policing
Yet, when viewed in the context of developments in urban policing since 1981, such a constitutionalist approach to issues of police power hardly seems realistic. During this period a policy of 'corporate policing' has been pursued, most notably in London under Sir Kenneth Newman. The policy calls for a shift away from earlier police tactics towards the black and inner-city communities, which relied on regular, high-profile and large-scale operations such as mass stop-and-search campaigns as a means of controlling the populace. Such tactics were seen by the Scarman Report and the Home Office establishment as carrying a high risk of provoking potentially violent confrontations with large sections of the community and leading to a 'downward spiral' in public cooperation with the police, as well as requiring continuing high levels of expenditure on police manpower and equipment.

By contrast, 'corporate policing' requires a supposedly more selective deployment of public order measures combined with more sophisticated surveillance and intelligence-gathering on inner-city communities, the introduction of various collaborative programmes of police-community cooperation, and a deliberate policy of news management by the police. To begin with, the police's public order capabilities underwent extensive modernisation and re-organisation following 1981. Not only were much larger numbers of police sent for routine riot-training but they were organised into a system of support units, consisting of vans of riot-equipped officers based in each local police

division constantly available for deployment to outbreaks of disorder. Under Newman, the role of these units was later expanded to include the conduct of special patrols, raids, roadblocks and the execution of warrants. But, in theory, these operations were to be more selective, being 'targeted' on particular 'symbolic locations' and specific individuals and groups identified through increased surveillance and intelligence-gathering. Programmes of police-community cooperation, such as neighbourhood watch, are one source of such intelligence and also enable the police to 'win over' some sections of the community, thereby further isolating its potentially dissident elements. Finally, local commanders would use news management techniques to control information on, and the interpretation of, events such as demonstrations and minor 'riots', preventing wider political support being attracted to their participants.

From the outset this strategy was highly dependent on the police hierarchy and especially on chief superintendents in charge of divisional-level operations being able to (re)assert tight, managerial control over rank-and-file officers on the beat and in support unit vans. The PACE Act specifically strengthened the formal role of superintendents in this respect, and in London Newman adopted a policy of appointing officers in his own corporate management mould to these posts, as well as introducing a new code of professional conduct for the police. Yet, in direct contradiction to this, the policy of militarisation of police training and equipment and the assignment of greater numbers of officers to support units only served to institutionalise further the action-oriented, macho culture of the police and its endemic racism. Moreover, as beat officers were diverted to schemes such as neighbourhood watch and others were assigned to local specialist crime squads, the support units came to be relied upon increasingly for routine patrolling of inner-city areas, where their whole mode of operation provided a new cloak of anonymity behind which officers could carry out attacks on members of the public. In the Newham 8 case in 1982, for example, a group of Asian youth set upon by plain clothes police from a support unit in the East End of London ended up being charged with conspiracy and affray when they defended themselves against what they perceived to be a fascist attack.

Communities under siege

Throughout 1984 these contradictions in 'corporate policing' were contained by virtue of the fact that many support units were deployed out of London and other cities to police the miners' strike. Indeed, the Metropolitan Police units gained notoriety during the strike for their particular brutality against miners' pickets and their communities. However, it is now clear that, once the miners' strike ended in early 1985 and the police support units returned (triumphant) to their urban bases,

there was a sharp intensification of police activity against the black community in several areas.

In Liverpool, there were complaints from June onwards about the deteriorating relations between the police and the public in Toxteth and especially the use of the city's Operational Support Unit to harass black residents. Over fifty armed police raids took place in Brixton during 1985 prior to the one in September that resulted in the shooting of Mrs Groce and the subsequent demonstrations and 'riot'. In Handsworth, this toughening up of policing was justified on the basis of the supposed concerns of (white) residents over a rise in drug use and trading in the area, and a similar rationalisation lay behind the increased number of police stops and searches of black people and their cars in and around Broadwater Farm in the weeks preceding the uprising there.

Since the rebellions in September and October 1985, any notion of selectivity and sensitivity in police tactics towards the black community has clearly been abandoned. On Broadwater Farm, under the pretext of hunting for those responsible for the death of a policeman during the 'riot', the estate has been placed under siege over several months, being constantly patrolled by between 200 and 400 officers drawn from support units throughout the area. In the process, raids – many involving armed police and the breaking down of doors with sledgehammers – have been carried out against over 120 homes, and those arrested, including juveniles, have been subjected to long periods of interrogation without access to lawyers or even having their families informed of their whereabouts. There have also been reports from residents of their telephones being tapped by the police and of regular video surveillance of the estate. Similar tactics in 'mopping up' suspects after the uprising have been reported from Handsworth. And in Brixton a new police commander has called in the Special Patrol Group to conduct precisely the type of high-profile operation against street crime that has led in the past to widespread community resentment and protest.

Losing control of the police
On the political front, the government ceded to the police the initiative in providing an official interpretation of the 'riots', pointedly refusing to set up a Scarman-type inquiry in to their causes. The Chief Constable's report on the Handsworth rebellion placed the primary blame on gangs of drug dealers supposedly stirring up resentment among youth in the area against the police as a cover for criminal activities. This view has now been firmly rejected by an independent inquiry on behalf of the Handsworth community which pointed out that, even though it was well known that the major drug dealers were white, and drug use was commonplace in many parts of the city, police operations were concentrated against black youth in Handsworth. The inquiry attributed the rebellion to oppressive policing and institutional racism in

several sectors of the city services and governmental programmes.

In the case of Broadwater Farm, an 'official' report prepared by the Assistant Chief Constable for the area not only attributed the 'riot' to criminality in the community but was also designed to meet criticisms by rank-and-file officers and their spokesmen in the Police Federation that local police commanders had failed to implement a contingency plan for seizing control of the estate during the 'riot'. Their claim was that, by adopting a defensive strategy of containment, officers on duty had been put up for attack as so many Aunt Sallies. In order to counter these claims, the Assistant Chief Constable's report repeated unattributed allegations about pre-planning of the 'riot' and the flooding of areas of the estate with 'lakes of petrol' to be set alight to ambush any police advance. When this report was leaked to the press even the *Guardian* concluded that something close to a 'conspiracy to murder' had been 'hatched' on the estate in the weeks prior to the uprising. But it soon emerged that it would have been physically impossible to flood the estate in the manner suggested and that there was little evidence to support the report's other allegations.

The rank-and-file were quick to take advantage of the political hiatus created by this breakdown in news management, releasing directly to the press the full text of a 'secret' internal report on Broadwater Farm prepared by a woman police sergeant in charge of the area's 'community policing' team. This not only repeated allegations that local commanders had allowed a 'no go' area to be established on the estate but also displayed a thinly-veiled contempt among police for local black leaders and residents. No disciplinary action has been taken against the officer concerned.

The credibility of police senior management suffered a futher major setback when the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) released their findings about the Holloway Road case, in which five North London youths were seriously assaulted in 1983 by police from a support unit van. The PCA admitted that, after a two and a half year investigation, it had been impossible to identify the van (let alone the officers) involved due to a conspiracy of silence among all thirty members of the three units on patrol in the area at the time. In fact, this is only one of many incidents that have come to light recently where, although civil damages have been paid to victims of police assaults, no action has been taken against the guilty officers. In the Holloway Road case, both Commissioner Newman and the Home Secretary at first accepted the PCA findings, albeit with much public hand wringing, but the flood of criticism this unleashed later forced a re-opening of the investigation and within hours four officers were charged.

Challenging police power
Even if these officers are eventually convicted, the Holloway Road case

raises much wider issues of police racism and power in Britain today. It demonstrates that police racism, far from being a product merely of the individual or collective prejudices of police officers to be eradicated through improved human awareness training, is deeply ingrained in the very structure and organisation of inner-city policing. For example, the policy of 'targeting' does not reduce the arbitrariness of police actions against the black community but actually institutionalises police suspicion in a more sophisticated and dangerous form, allowing places such as the Broadwater Farm Youth Association to be singled out for police attention on the basis of its being a centre for political activity in the area. Similarly, the support unit system reinforces racism and what one senior officer has admitted to be a 'culture of violence' amongst police and provides a base for acting these out in abuses of the community.

The Labour Party must have a policy equal to the task of challenging this institutionalised racism and the concentration of power in the police which sustains it. This demands a comprehensive programme to limit and reduce police power at every level, and not merely to superimpose a machinery of formal accountability over the existing structure of policing. In this, Labour may have a lesson to learn from the Tories' attack on local government, in which the full range of legislative, financial, judicial and political weapons available to central government, to the point of abolishing whole authorities, have been deployed to contain local councils' powers.

In a similar fashion, a Labour government must be prepared to tackle the issue of excessive police power on several fronts. Not only must present legislation on police legal powers and public order be repealed but it needs to be replaced by effective limitations on future police conduct in these areas, backed by sanctions such as a strict exclusionary rule barring the use of illegally obtained evidence and 'confessions' in court proceedings. There needs to be a centrally-imposed ban on plastic bullets and CS gas, and the use of other items of offensive equipment, as well as police computers, should be restricted and carefully regulated by central government. The scope of certain police operations, such as the National Reporting Centre and the mutual support arrangements between forces used so devastatingly against the miners, should also be limited, possibly by restricting a constable's legal remit to a given police area.

More generally, police spending and manpower must be curtailed in favour of other, non-policing programmes of community support and crime prevention. And above all, the issue of the massive militarisation of the police through riot-training and equipment and the creation of the whole system of support units must be met head on at a national level and not left to reform through local police authorities. The support units, like the Special Patrol Group, should be disbanded and not simply have their role re-defined yet again, as is presently being considered by Newman in London.

These measures should be seen as a pre-condition for effective accountability and crime prevention, not merely as by-products of such policies. Certainly, no community-based initiative in crime prevention will obtain the broad-based public support essential for its success if it entails collaboration with the police in their present, unreformed state. (In the meantime, Labour councils have a further duty to ensure that in promoting these initiatives, especially when they are based on organisations such as tenants' associations, that existing patterns of racism are not perpetuated and reinforced in the process.) More importantly in the long term, unless the present base of their power is comprehensively reformed, then the police will retain the capacity and the political will to generate and make commonplace the level and intensity of violence used against the miners.

LEE BRIDGES

Book reviews

The Politics of the World Economy

By IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN (Cambridge and New York,
Cambridge University Press, 1984). 191 pp. £17.50

Wallerstein's papers on *The Politics of the World Economy* that are
brought together in this volume were published in the period between
1978 to 1983 and follow his earlier writings on *The Capitalist World
Economy* (1979). Notions of strong and weak states play a central role in
his arguments about the determination of core and peripheral countries
in what he chooses to call the capitalist world economy. But there was
no discussion of the state in the earlier works. The papers now publish-
ed might have provided just that. But Wallerstein does not manage to go
much beyond his original schema.

   The two collections of theoretical papers referred to above and the
volumes that comprise Wallerstein's ambitious historical project, *The
Modern World System*, are best read together, against the background
of theoretical debates of the 1970s, for an overall assessment of Waller-
stein's work and the point of his present series of articles on the state
and politics. The background to Wallerstein's presumed claim to have
constructed a new paradigm for radical scholarship for understanding
the process of historical development may be found in the emergence of
underdevelopment theory, pioneered by André Gunder Frank in the
1960s, which forcefully argued the existence of a reciprocal link between
the development of advanced capitalist societies and the underdevelop-
ment of the Third World. Frank's work itself had its intellectual roots in
the seminal work of Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*
(New York, 1957), which was theoretically far more sophisticated. But it
was Frank's work in the 1960s-70s that made a quite remarkable impact
on the intellectual scene for, against the background of intellectual
radicalisation following Cuba and Vietnam, it came at the right

moment. Frank's spell was to be exorcised in two rather different ways. Firstly there was the devastating theoretical critique of Ernesto Laclau.[1] But, secondly, and more interestingly, it happened by virtue of its appropriation by Wallerstein who transformed it, throwing away all that gave Frank's work its political edge, and turning Frank's line of argument into its own antithesis.

Frank's intervention in debates about the colonised (and neocolonial or post-colonial) Third World entailed a double confrontation. He offered a powerful challenge to the teleological foundations of modernisation theory which sought the salvation of these countries in a fuller and freer development of capitalism, without taking much notice of the specificities and the hierarchies of peripheral capitalism and their effects on the nature of the international division of labour and different modes of production and capital accumulation, in the metropolis and the dependent periphery. Likewise, the view of the impact of capital on colonised societies taken by undialectical and mechanistic interpretations of marxist theory, in the form in which it was championed by Laclau, differed from this only insofar as it emphasised the exploitative aspect of colonialism. But its teleology was essentially no different. It took the view that the process of capitalist development, once it was set in motion in colonised societies, would bring into existence a 'national bourgeoisie' which would be anti-imperialist and anti-feudal and would set in motion a process of independent capitalist development. In Frank's vision, the indigenous bourgeoisie was structurally linked with the metropolitan bourgeoisie, as its local collaborator, and could not be a force for national liberation.

Frank's intervention was passionate as well as intellectually effective for he said what the world of radical scholarship was waiting to hear. In the circumstances it seemed to matter little that his theoretical scheme was untidy and begged many questions. He was not to recover easily from the decisive blow that was delivered by Ernesto Laclau, reinstating another orthodoxy. Attempts have been made by some scholars (including this reviewer) to reestablish the essentials of Frank's argument on a more reliable theoretical basis.[2] But Frank himself has surrendered intellectually to Wallerstein's beguiling systematisation of his argument and thereby its radical inversion.

Wallerstein's method is to proceed from a series of definitions and *ex cathedra* judgments by deductive logic. This procedure gives a sense of theoretical coherence and, to the unwary, an irresistible force to his line of reasoning. His massive volumes on the history of *The Modern World System* with their impressive marshalling of historical data may seem to contradict the suggestion that he proceeds on an *a priori* basis. But a careful examination of his historical work will show that he subordinates historical data to his predetermined scheme rather than uses historical evidence to test and develop his theory. A good illustration

of this procedure is the case of the so-called 'second serfdom' in Eastern Europe which was triggered off by the rise of the Baltic grain trade. Wallerstein resolves the problem by the simple device of refusing to recognise the fact of the second serfdom as a feudal structure for, by his definition, it was capitalist, regardless of its internal structure, by virtue of being involved in international trade. He defines serfdom therefore as merely a different method of labour control. This is typical of the cavalier fashion in which Wallerstein treats large issues simply by imposing definitions that rule important questions out of the way. Likewise post-revolutionary societies like the Soviet Union and China are also defined as 'capitalist', being involved in the global network of trade. Such a conceptual scheme is valueless and empty, for it does not enable us to distinguish between structurally different kinds of societies which operate in quite different ways, in accordance with quite different logics, and he fails to provide analytical tools with which we may examine the internal structures and tensions of the various societies that he designates as cores or peripheries.

Wallerstein's criterion of exchange and trade to define capitalism invited a telling critique from Robert Brenner[3] which has evidently struck home. In the present collection of essays Wallerstein shifts his ground a little and, instead of emphasising exchange and trade as defining criteria, he now uses a new set of concepts which are not explained or elaborated. Here again we find the familiar circularity of reasoning. He now differentiates countries on the basis of production processes which are classified as 'core-like' and 'periphery-like' so that core countries are engaged in core-like production processes and peripheral countries are engaged in 'periphery-like' production processes. Simple. He cautions us, however, that 'No product is inherently core-like or periphery-like ... Nonetheless there are always some products which are core-like and others that are periphery-like at any given time'. We are expected to take this seriously as a basis for analysis of structural differences between countries.

Likewise, in this book devoted to politics and the state, we are given precious little to go on for an explanation of the nature of states and politics in different kinds of countries in the capitalist world system. There is one point made by Wallerstein that is by no means trivial. Given his insistence that the economy of the modern world system is necessarily a global one and can be understood and dealt with only as such, there is a disjuncture, he points out, between the global nature of the economy and the localised character of states and politics that are enclosed within national boundaries. Political struggles, notably those of the proletariat, he argues, are thereby deflected from the real target, the world system, and are directed instead to false targets and misconceived aims of national liberation which is a mirage. National liberation means nothing, because the 'liberated' post-revolutionary

societies still remain integrally parts of the world capitalist system by virtue of their continued trading relations with the rest of the world.

Wallerstein's theoretical model therefore is not just an academic's fancy. It carries a powerful political message. It could well be argued that his model is theoretically empty, for it fails to provide adequate tools for analysis of the various types of societies and, in particular, internal configurations of class forces within them, a question that falls outside the ambit of his conceptual scheme. But far more significant, one might think, are the political corrollaries of his theory which are subversive of the aspirations of all national liberation movements in the Third World. Only a simultaneous global revolution, Wallerstein argues, can save the world proletariat. Until that final day of redemption arrives, all nation-based anti-colonial liberation movements are futile. The struggles of the people of Vietnam or Nicaragua are all to no avail, for theoretically at least they will continue to remain a part of the Wallerstein modern world system, for they will continue to trade with the rest of the world. What they are doing internally in the meanwhile is evidently of not much consequence for Wallerstein. They are wasting their time – and their lives.

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1   Ernesto Laclau, 'Feudalism and capitalism in Latin America', in *New Left Review*, (no. 67, 1971)
2   See H. Alavi, 'The structure of peripheral capitalism' in H. Alavi and T. Shanin, *Introduction to the Sociology of Developing Societies*, (New York, 1982) and H. Alavi et al., *Capitalism and Colonial Production*, (London, 1982).
3   R. Brenner, 'The origins of capitalist development: a critique of neo-Smithian Marxism', in *New Left Review*, (no. 104, 1977).

Call Me Woman

By ELLEN KUZWAYO (London, The Women's Press, 1985). 266pp. £5.95.

Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography *Call Me Woman* covers the entire chronology of legislation in South Africa relating to the black community, from the Act of Union in 1910 to the 1984 constitution incorporating a form of partisan tricameral legislature thwarting the democratic wishes of the black majority. Mrs Kuzwayo's life story, fraught with tragedy yet told with commendable tolerance and equanimity, is therefore a testimony at first hand of the signposting, then structuring, of apartheid.

Ellen Kuzwayo's family had put down deep roots in Southern Africa. Her grandfather Jeremiah Makoloi, born in the Orange Free State in

1860, translated the New Testament into Serolong, his own language, and was secretary of the Native National Congress, forerunner of the African National Congress. Very vividly the author recreates the world of her childhood in the freedom of Thaba Patchoa Farm, the family homestead. At the age of fourteen, when she leaves the farm to attend St Paul's Higher Primary School in Thaba'Nchu, in 1927, Ellen has her first wrench with a traditional way of life organised around *matsema* (communal work camps), ritual practices such as *lebollo* (the circumcision schools) and the imbibing by adults of *bojaloa* (home-made beer), and the making and marketing of pottery, grass mats, baskets and other craft work. A spell at St Francis' college, Mariannhill, in Natal, two years later, is a further wrench. Kuzwayo admits to bearing lasting psychological scars left from exposure to what was to her a narrow and alien fetishism. 'The ethics of my faith ran contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church'. Fort Hare, by contrast, is recalled with more affection for the opportunity, this, the oldest established black university in South Africa, gave her of an insight into a more spacious world. 'Being a student in this college influenced your outlook, values and way of life'.

With the onset of sophistication comes a feeling of alienation. There is a growing disenchantment with the South African social and political scene, any overt projection of black consciousness is construed as a form of criminal activity. Yet, paradoxically, the system itself is likely to encourage some form of therapeutic self-preservation. Where a much publicised Non-European Affairs Department, to give just one example of a segregated functional instrument, is seen by the white South African, not as institutionally polarised and divisive, but as administratively and morally desirable, the odds are heavily stacked against the black 'outsider'.

It was perhaps inevitable that this sensitive, intelligent and courageous woman should have been drawn into the struggle against apartheid. She became interested in the youth section of the African National Congress in 1943. This brought her into close contact with personalities such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo, all committed to the dismantling of Afrikanerdom. That was in Johannesburg. She had been shocked to see the appalling living conditions of the black migrant labour pool when she took a job there as a teacher. It was there, too, in the fifties, that she met Winifred Nomzamo (afterwards Mandela) as a fellow student at the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work. In common with Mrs Mandela and a growing band of progressive women, she has been harassed by the South African authorities. She even had to endure a term of imprisonment on an unspecified charge. Then a dedicated feminist who set the 'physical, psychological and emotional liberation of black women' as a prime objective, the focus of her work was civic rather than political.

The shock waves from traumatic events such as the Native Land Act (1913), the Native Land and Trust Act (1936), the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), the Bantu Authorities Act (1951), the ANC Treason Trial (1956-61), the Sharpeville Massacre (1960) and the Rivonia Trial (1964), woven poignantly into the texture of the narrative, form an integral part of Kuzwayo's autobiography. The case against apartheid, seen as a purely negative ideology, is presented with authority and its wider ramifications felt within a world context of the need to suppress all forms political tyranny, an abiding vindication for the continuing presence of an organisation such as the United Nations Assembly. However, it is through the example of Mrs Kuzwayo's subjective experience as woman, wife and mother in a country she still loves that the most damaging emotional and psychological effects of a morally bankrupt police state make their most telling impact.

University of London   ANGUS RICHMOND

To bury our fathers: a novel of Nicaragua

By SERGIO RAMIREZ (London, Readers International, 1985). Translated by Nick Caistor. 253 pp. £5.95.

At one level, *To bury our fathers* is about Nicaragua's part in the continental struggle to escape the economic, cultural, political and military domination of the United States, about its struggle for more than a century to be a country, not an unconsidered corner of imperialism's backyard. In this process, individuals also labour to achieve personal and social identity, and the book has resonances which take it far beyond the level of purely local or documentary interest.

To bury our fathers (its Spanish title means *Were you afraid of the blood?*) was written in West Berlin between 1973-75 – after which Ramirez went to Costa Rica to work in the FSLN. Now vice-president, he has written little since. The novel's structure is complex, with six inter-related strands treating events from 1930 to 1961, and following the fortunes of characters from different social strata, all linked in the struggle between *somocismo* and *sandinismo*. Only one of these threads, in which a son brings his father's body back from Guatemala, has any semblance of a continuous 'narrative present'; the others recede through levels of reminiscence, interior recollection, and story-telling at one, two, or even three removes from their fictive starting point. Events are not presented in chronological order, and the effect is of kaleidoscopic images leaping out of a frustrating structure which would defeat most readers were it not for the introductory plot synopses, each with a woodcut design that recurs throughout the text, and the concluding chronology of events.

The construction may be arbitrary or over-elaborate, but the method can be defended in that, in the years of dictatorship it describes, time seemed to be circular, movement illusory, the outcome of human projects either random or predetermined. The pervasive presence of *el hombre* is the medium in which everything else takes place, and if this flattens out the characters as individuals, it also points up the sense of the sub-title, 'a novel of Nicaragua'. The novel's focus is on minute and vivid descriptions – the squalor of Lake Managua, the mirage-like Atlantic Coast – and on images which have been worked by memory and myth into icons: the figure of a deranged old man, cheated of his election, ever pacing up and down, 'the presidential sash smeared with swallow droppings still draped across his chest'.

If the accumulation of detail suggests an exile's compulsion to recapture the minutiae of his home, it also expresses a general human need to work on personal and collective memory to recover the unreachable homeland of the past; 'life' is a narrative which has to be reinvented from day to day, and all the characters tell stories in order to be able to project themselves into a coherent future. These stories are full of parallels: the rigged elections of a president and of Miss Nicaragua are equivalent in the distorted world of dictatorship, *el hombre*'s daughter is crowned Queen of the Army during a tragi-farcical plot, while later a ball for US Marine officers' 'astonishingly tall' wives collapses in chaos; National Guard Colonel Catalino Lopez survives a massacre in a cinema and is later humiliated in a brothel. Women are in the interstices of this design: wives gambled away at dice, a daughter won in a raffle; the 'girl prodigies' of Lasinventura's brothel and the Flying Yolanda, a Salvadorean trapeze artist who inspired a foxtrot.

It is hard indeed to imagine the wandering, defeated characters of Ramirez's fiction as in any way the forerunners of a successful uprising: what Ramirez does convey is a sense of the totality with which the revolution has to deal, and the importance of its historical roots. He himself cautions against a propagandistic understanding of literature. Nevertheless, as well as appreciating the novel's fine texture of language and incident, and the powerful materiality of its vision (amply conveyed in Nick Caistor's translation), we can also use it as a tool to deepen our understanding of the particularities of the Nicaraguan struggle.

London   IMOGEN FORSTER

Ethnicity, Class and Gender in Australia

Edited by GILL BOTTOMLEY and MARIE DE LEPERVANCHE
(Sydney, London, and Boston, George Allen and Unwin, 1984). 218 pp.,
£6.50.

One in three of Australia's fifteen million people are there because of
post-1945 migration: they are either migrants or their children. Over 60
per cent of the increase in the workforce between 1947 and 1972 was
provided by labour migration. About two-fifths of the newcomers were
British, the rest came from eastern and southern Europe, then from
Turkey and Lebanon and most recently from South-east Asia.

The irony of this is that the original aim of Australia's immigration
policy was to keep the country ethnically homogenous. There were anti-
Chinese riots in the goldfields in the mid-nineteenth century. Later,
white workers tried to exclude Indians and Pacific Islanders recruited by
Queensland plantations. The 'White Australia Policy' was one of the
first measures of the new democratic parliament in 1901. Nation-
building was based on racism. The trauma of near-invasion by the
Japanese in the Second World War led to a policy of 'populate or perish'
after 1945. But the assisted passages were designed for British migrants.
Economic growth soon led employers to demand ever increasing
numbers of workers for the new mines and factories. Recruitment was
extended to eastern Europe (fair-skinned anti-communist refugees
seemed acceptable), and then to southern Europe. The 'White Australia
Policy' was finally dropped in the 1960s. The aim of the state was to
assimilate the 'New Australians' and make them indistinguishable from
other citizens, at least by the second generation. Such policies failed, as
they have everywhere. Since the 1970s, Australians have been trying to
get to grips with the realities of a multi-ethnic society.

The collection of essays edited by Gill Bottomley and Marie de Leper-
vanche examines migration and ethnic diversity from a critical left
perspective. They analyse the dynamics of Australian capitalist society,
looking at class formation and fragmentation, the construction of
gender and ethnicity, and the formulation and maintenance of
ideologies of domination based on class, gender and race.

The first chapter, by Jock Collins, provides a political economy
framework for analysing the relationship between labour migration and
class formation in Australia, with brief descriptions of the social
classes. Andrew Jakubowicz shows how the official policy of
'multiculturalism', introduced by the conservative Fraser government in
the late 1970s, is itself an ideology used for controlling the non-Anglo
working class and for coopting ethnic leaders. This contribution has a
strong comparative focus, looking at neo-conservative strategies in the
USA and Britain, as well as in Australia. Marie de Lepervanche con-
tinues with a very readable critique of socio-biological theories of

'natural inequality'. She shows how socio-biology is becoming a new 'fundamentalist religion', making the inequalities of race, ethnic origin and gender inevitable, while denying the structural inequalities of class. Two further chapters deepen the analysis of multiculturalism as a class ideology: Michael Morrissey examines the way cultural difference is used to justify exploitation, taking his examples from the field of occupational health. Mary Kalanzis and Bill Cope look at multicultural education, and document an alternative approach they have themselves developed and tried out in Sydney schools.

The two essays by Gill Bottomley and Jeannie Martin focus on the situation of migrant women, relating gender roles and social experience before migration to the subsequent position in the Australian labour process, and in social reproduction. Both authors examine political dimensions of the consciousness and mobilisation of migrant women, relating them to strategies of the trade unions and of the women's movement. Constance Lever Tracey's case study of the strikes at Ford's huge Melbourne factory in 1973 and 1981 highlights the emergence of a 'new Australian working class'. Interviews with shop-floor leadership point to the role of ethnic shop-stewards in developing inter-ethnic class unity in struggle. She attacks the myth of the docile and passively exploitable migrant worker.

Finally, three chapters look at the dynamics of community development of specific ethnic groups. Michael Kakakios and John van der Velden examine the relations between migrant community and class with regard to Greeks. Bill Hampel discusses the experience of young Sicilian Australians in terms of the relative saliency of ethnicity and class. Michael Humphrey looks at conflicts between Islamic law and Australian family law in the case of Lebanese in Sydney. He shows that the issue is not primarily one of 'cultural conflict' but the result of class, status and political conflicts, arising through migration to an advanced capitalist society.

As the editors point out in the Preface, one issue has been excluded: the position of the Aboriginals in multicultural Australia. There are clearly difficulties in fitting Aboriginals into a class analysis, and it is problematic to lump them together with migrants. Yet the omission is a problem too: the history of British colonialism and of nation-building in Australia is a history of genocide against the original inhabitants. A full understanding of the role of racism in Australian society requires a framework which draws in both the situation of the Aborigines and the migrant experience. Nonetheless, this book is essential reading for anyone interested in the dynamics of contemporary Australian society. It is also of value for those interested in comparative perspectives on class, ethnicity and gender. The volume could perhaps have been further enhanced if the editors had added a final chapter, pulling together the strands of the analysis, and theorising the relationship between

labour process, migration, restructuring and ideology in the Australian context.

Ethnicity, Class and Gender in Australia lets us observe Australian history in the making. The country is ceasing to be the home of Victorian social values, and is no longer 'more English than England'. The future lies not just with transnational capital, which is reshaping the economy, but also with an emerging new working class. As Constance Lever Tracy reports, the process of change is not polite or calm. In the immortal phrase of a Ford shop steward: 'We explode together.'

University of Wollongong   STEPHEN CASTLES

Passbook Number F. 47927: women and Mau Mau in Kenya

By MUTHONI LIKIMANI (London, Macmillan, 1985). 209 pp. £6.95 paper

This is the first book on the Mau Mau struggle in Kenya during the 1950s that directly addresses the impact of that struggle on women. *Passbook Number F. 47927* consists of an introductory essay by Jean O'Barr and nine fictionalised accounts of women's experiences during Mau Mau, drawn from the observations of Muthoni Likimani, her family and friends. Likimani focuses on the lives of those Kenyan women who did not join the 'freedom fighters' in the forest, but were nevertheless profoundly affected by Mau Mau.

The first two accounts describe the beginning of Mau Mau, the introduction of passbooks and forced communal labour. In order to obtain a passbook, women had to be either living with their husbands or fathers, or in formal employment. Many women living in Nairobi in the 1950s earned their living in the 'informal sector', through beerbrewing, small-scale trading or prostitution, and did not fit the criteria demanded. Such women had either to find a 'husband' or face repatriation back to their villages where they were forced to engage in communal labour projects, as the majority of the men were away working as wage labour, fighting in the forest or serving as pro-government 'homeguards'. Communal labour put an increased burden on women, reducing the amount of time they had to produce food for their families and to do their household tasks. When a curfew was also enforced, many women had difficulties finishing their own work and increasingly relied on each other for assistance.

In the subsequent chapters, Likamani details how the daily lives of Kikuyu women from different parts of Kenya were affected by Mau Mau. In '*Komerera*-Lie Low', three women decide to leave their village without permission and look for their husbands in Nairobi, despite the dangers involved. 'The Squatters' Tragedy' is an account of the effect of

forced relocation of Kikuyu families from European farms in the Rift Valley to Central Province, via detention camps and screening. Rape in detention camps and the rural areas by homeguards occurred frequently and Likimani notes this, but she does not describe what actions women took to try and fight back or avoid this fate. Some women would make themselves particularly unattractive or unpleasant in order to avoid the attentions of the homeguards; while others would actively encourage the homeguards in order to obtain information or weapons for the freedom fighters.

Little indication is given in the book about the active and important role women played, providing food and information for the forest fighters. And even when women are shown to assist the fighters, as in 'Unforgotten flames' and 'Vanishing Camp', they are not portrayed as active participants. In the one, a woman finds fighters in her garden and they demand her help, and in the other, a woman meets an old boyfriend in a detention camp who persuades her to help. Likimani's stories are essentially about those many men and women who were caught up in the events of Mau Mau without actively choosing to be involved.

There are two major problems with this book: the style and the introductory essay. Oral accounts have an intimacy and value which fiction does not, and trying to merge the two forms in fictionalised accounts results in poor prose. Had Likimani stuck to the oral testimonies of her friends and family, a far more interesting and useful history of women's role in Mau Mau could have been produced. It falls to the long introductory essay by Jean O'Barr to give the accounts some context. O'Barr gives a brief introduction to the history of Kenya, the previous historiography on women in Mau Mau and the position of women in Kenya. Introductions like this, however, not only provide the background to the main text, but also tend to interpret for the reader the experiences of the participants, reducing both their value and poignancy.

London   HILARY FISHER

Faith in the City: a call for action by church and nation

The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas (London, Church House Publishing, 1985) 398pp. £7.50

In 1983, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Robert Runcie, appointed a Commission to investigate the state of Britain's inner cities. The Commission published its report, 'Faith in the City', late in 1985 as a challenge to the governments of both church and nation to clearly commit themselves to the regeneration of the inner cities and outlying

estates. Although the majority of the Commission's recommendations are church-oriented, it was its comments on issues of public policy that attracted a hostile reaction from the government, and transformed it in the media from a plea of conscience into a fundamental critique of Thatcherite policies. Beyond the media hype, *Faith in the City* represents the 'state of the art' in a Christian liberal approach to the management of urban deprivation and disorder; an attempt to stir the consciences of the powerful rather than an encouragement for people to seek their own liberation.

The Commission's approach to the place of black people in Britain is a good example of its theology of moderation. Some of the material conditions of black people's lives are acknowledged. They are seen to be underrepresented in the leadership of the church and country at all levels, but overrepresented in prisons, bad housing, unskilled work and dole queues. The Commission deliberately avoids any historical or political perspective that could allow these facts to be understood as symptomatic of anything more than personal 'racial prejudice' or 'racial discrimination'; it suggests proposals designed to make black people more equal through increasing the awareness of the powerful of their ethnic needs and contributions. The approach is pure Scarman, right down to its degradation of black experience in its refusal to recognise Britain as a racist society or to acknowledge the depth and integrity of black resistance to it as such. For example, commenting on allegations of discrimination and prejudice in the criminal justice system, the Commission writes:

> Some of these allegations are well substantiated. We would not wish to use such evidence (some of it hearsay) to level criticism specifically at the police or magistracy [as] ... manifestations of racial prejudice are likely to occur in every branch of society and in every institution (including the Church) in Britain today. Such treatment is stoically endured by the great majority of black people.

In much the same way that the political experiences of black people are undervalued in the report, the Commission dismisses all but white, middle class, male and reformist theology, as relevant to British conditions. Domestic, American and African black theology receives no mention at all, whilst comparable theologies generated in Latin America are noted only to be written off: 'it is often said, and doubtless rightly, that conditions in Western Europe are not such that this kind of political "liberation" could ever be a comparable theological priority'. A theological priority for whom? Certainly not for the Church of England as it pleads with the wealthy and powerful to 'remember the poor' whilst tacitly accepting and supporting the unequal distribution of wealth and power in British society as the normal life of the nation.

Birmingham   PAUL GRANT

Hogarth's Blacks: images of blacks in eighteenth century English art

By DAVID DABYDEEN (Kingston-upon-Thames, Dangeroo Press, 1985) 155pp. £12.95 cloth, £6.95 paper

'Every artist writes his own autobiography'. Hogarth not only reveals himself in his paintings, but he also wrote in them the biography of a society – not of the rulers, politicians and the upper classes, but of the prostitutes, criminals, beggars and misfits. Hogarth's blacks formed an integral part of this world – he was in fact the most prolific painter and engraver of blacks among eighteenth century artists, and yet the place of blacks in his art has been ignored by the art world. Many critics have written exhaustively about Hogarth, analysing each painting and engraving in detail, identifying and explaining the significance of each character and the symbolism of each object, yet virtually no mention is made of the black characters and what they symbolise. Dabydeen, having identified the omission, proceeds in this book to describe and analyse all of Hogarth's black works. He indeed uses the presence of blacks in Hogarth's painting as 'a key to unlocking Hogarth's narrative puzzles'.

Prior to Hogarth, blacks appeared in conventional portrait paintings merely to reflect the superiority of whites. These blacks were slaves or servants, prized possessions of the wealthy, and they would be painted with their master of mistress to emphasise the latter's wealth and power. Although Hogarth too used blacks, he had very different motives from all previous painters. Instead of using blacks to point out the superiority of whites over blacks, he employed the black presence to ridicule and emphasise the evils of (white) eighteenth century society. He stood artistic tradition on its head by depicting life in the gutter and showing at the same time the direct connection between the misery of the poor and the greed of the wealthy.

His scenes of the exploitation of women in *A Harlot's Progress* and the degrading prison conditions in *A Rake's Progress* may have been denigrated (and I use the work advisedly) by the rich and powerful as themes unworthy of 'great art', but it was an art that, for the first time, was available to the mass of the people. Dabydeen points out that in all the 'novels in print' series – *Four Times of Day*; *The Four Stages of Cruelty*; *Enthusiasm Delineated*; *Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism*: *A Harlot's Progress*; *A Rake's Progress* and *Marriage à la Mode*, Hogarth used blacks. The presence of black servants was accepted in eighteenth century art, and Hogarth too used them in his paintings, but he moved away from accepted convention by painting blacks who were individuals with histories of their own and a place in the culture of the dispossessed. Blacks were an accepted part of lower class life, and Hogarth in some of his bawdy street and tavern scenes depicts the shared misery and the shared sexual pleasure between whites and blacks alike.

Hogarth is unusual too in portraying black women – there are in particular two poignant images of black women, whose presence is vividly described by Dabydeen. The first, in *A Harlot's Progress*, is of a pregnant black woman beating hemp with the woman Moll when she ends up in prison as a common prostitute. The black woman here sysmbolises the economic and sexual exploitation of women, who like Moll, are first lured into prostitution, then imprisoned and later deported to the colonies as forced labour and to breed children. 'The pregnant black woman symbolises the relentless, circular economic process: she bears in her belly a future slave who will be exploited or prostituted as she was.' The other is a wretched, old beggar woman in *Morning*, huddled over a fire, and soliciting alms from the self-righteous, church-going old spinster, who ignores her plea. The one represents paganism, and the other civilised religion. Hogarth's masterly juxtaposition of the two characters immediately dispels any illusions about Christian charity.

A wealth of detailed symbolism is explained in this book, throwing light of white attitudes to blacks, the conditions of blacks living in eighteenth century England and Hogarth'a attitude to slavery and colonialism. In 1750 Hogarth wrote his *Analysis of Beauty*. Dabydeen gives a full account of Hogarth's ability to stand back from the prevailing attitudes of the time and find beauty in variety of complexion and colour, as illustrated in his painting *Captain Lord Graham in his cabin*, which contrasts the white master and black servant, but paints them as equally fine and beautiful. Dabydeen's exegesis, however, deserves a better (colour) reproduction of Hogarth's paintings than the listless monochrome plates that are scattered throughout the text.

Clent   ROSLYN ZALIN

Strangers and sisters: women, race and immigration

Edited by SELMA JAMES (Bristol, Falling Wall Press, 1985). 231 pp. £5.95.

Very often readers come to our library enquiring for something on 'black women' or about 'black women in the labour force' or on 'black women and why they came'. We reach down the tomes wherein black women's experiences – rather like wild flowers – have been pressed, dried and preserved for posterity by sociologist and statistician who leave neither vitality nor essence on the pages. *Strangers and sisters*, a verbatim rendering of a 1982 conference of women (mainly black) discussing race and immigration, puts the scent and sap back on to the printed page.

Women from Ireland, Iran, Argentina, Bangladesh, Nigeria, the

Caribbean tell of their experiences – of colonialism, police brutality, male violence, immigration controls, trade union struggles and legal battles. Many tell of their coming to Britain as immigrants or refugees, whilst others, such as Clotil Walcott (Trinidadian trade unionist and women's rights campaigner) and Margaret Prescod (organiser in the US), remind the audience of the similarity of black women's struggles everywhere.

It is hard to capture the atmosphere of a conference in a book and it really irritates more than establishes camaraderie to keep stumbling across '(*applause*)' or '(*laughter*)' at every turn. There is also at times a sense of something smug and self-congratulatory going on – everyone thanking everyone else, and everyone celebrating a 'memorable event', 'an enthusiastic and deeply moved audience', a conference that 'did make history', and so on. But all these grouses aside, what coheres the book and sets it apart for me is the way in which Selma James has introduced and edited it. This is, of course, not to say that all the many organisations involved in mounting the conference were not important. But what comes across from the book is that Selma's contribution was crucial.

It is impossible to be indifferent to Selma James. So clear and definite are her views on (and interventions in) women's politics that she invites either total support or total rejection. What made her so unpopular in sections of the women's movement in the 1970s was that she approached a movement which prided itself on being amorphous with so clear a sense of politics and so strenuous an organising capacity. It was not just that some women disagreed with 'wages for housework' – Selma's line – but that they resented the lasting impact of the demand. And somewhere in the collective unconscious of so-called Socialist Feminism lurked the uncomfortable suspicion that her slogan (however wrong) was based in a sounder knowledge of marxism and a more faithful grasp of the nature of women's oppression and exploitation.

When both the women's and the black movements are becoming fragmented, depoliticised and redolent of individual self-seekers, Selma's writing, whether one agrees with her ultimate position or not, comes as a breath of fresh air. Unity between women is based for her not on a common hatred of men but on a common experience of work and of being exploited:

> Feminism without the work we have in common on the one hand and the different workloads that divide us on the other; without the poverty we share on the one hand and the hierarchy of wages on the other; such a feminism tends to be so vacant and so narrow that race and immigration are treated as complications which get in the way of 'the struggle against the patriarchy'.

Separatism, according to Selma, is 'also a formula for defeat ...

whoever suggests that we reject the support [of other sections] intends us, women or men, for whatever reason, to be isolated, the victims of divide and rule again, this time in the name of our own movements.' Aspects of identity such as 'sex, race, age, nation, physical disability' are, for her, not to be situated in the psychologism of 'identity politics' but to be viewed as an expression of 'the quantity of work and the wages or lack of wages mapped out for each particular sector' and the power relations which accompany them.

Strangers and sisters underlines three other critical themes: a belief in a concrete internationalism, the necessity of making the base-line of women's experience that of the black working-class woman, and the knowledge that history is a continuum – our struggles today having been made possible by all the generations of women who fought before us, whether in Britain or 'back home'.

The conference and especially the introduction, evaluation and postscript (by Selma) are full of hope and possibility – mostly because Selma herself has the gift of converting into political advantages and victories what to others look like incoherent and disparate acts or experiences. It is an important gift because it rouses people, gives people an authority over their own experience and finally a sense of power. But there is also the danger of it falling into intellectual dishonesty by not distinguishing between a rallying cry and reality. 'The grassroots at this conference', writes Selma, '*wielded* power in a way that enhanced all women's power' (my emphasis). Power through and at a one-day conference?

Similarly, when Selma writes of the hidden costs to women of immigration (women's unpaid labour being the focus of her whole political thrust), she appears to cheat on language to enhance her argument:

> How much work do women do to make immigration possible, to make possible the rebuilding of the community in a new town, city, country; among other races; speaking other languages; with different food, dress, customs, education, religions, hierarchies? What is the hidden cost – hidden because women pay it and are not paid for doing it – when the family and community have to confront and survive the economic and social consequences of racism . . . ?

Isn't there an attempt here to convert emotional and spiritual cost into economic cost – a payment of the soul into a literal cash deficit? And do men never pay a human cost? But then, at other times her language is so true that it illumines a whole area – for example, when she writes of black struggle against the police:

> there is rarely a mention of the women – mothers and sisters, wives and lovers – who go back and forth to courts and prisons, who organise defence committees and attend their meetings, some on

winter nights after long days cleaning hospitals; or who deliver to prison cells, along with home cooking and cigarettes (and at times unwelcome words of advice), the laundered shirts, so that the accused – son, brother, husband or lover – can appear before his prosecutors dressed in the community's care and support.

Institute of Race Relations   JENNY BOURNE.

The Worst of Times: an oral history of the Great Depression in Britain
By NIGEL GRAY (London, Wildwood, 1986). 201 pp. £11.95

The plight of the British working class during the Great Depression of the 1920s and 30s has been too often overlooked by historians. Some right-wing academics, for their part, have argued that Britain between the wars was a country of affluence and prosperity – a land of motor cars, radio sets and seaside holidays. For millions of people throughout Britain, however, poverty, unemployment and hunger were realities. *The Worst of Times* vividly conveys the full implications of working-class life during the Great Depression: the misery and deprivation to which so many were subjected, the injustices and the personal tragedies. It was also, however, an era of growing working-class militancy; if the naked brutality of British capitalism was forcing thousands into submission, it was provoking many more into defending their class.

The book comprises the personal recollections of twelve individuals, men and women, from around the country during the Depression. The text is drawn entirely from edited transcripts of interviews and letters, and is therefore straightforward and uncomplicated, but engrossing nonetheless.

Joseph Farrington's father was an iron moulder who was invariably out of work; as a shop steward and a socialist he was one of the many workers who were victimised by the bosses. Joseph recalls how his father 'led 35,000 up London Road on a hunger march' and describes with amusement how the workers fought a pitched battle with the police, fire brigade and troops who had been sent in to break up the demonstration. 'Well they went for the police. They was throwing bricks. The police went in with their batons. They were knocking people down ... My dad said to me, "Make your best way home, Son. Get off home." As I was going I see this big policeman go to grab him, and Dad hit him with money box. Cracked him and knocked him down'.

Kenneth Maher of Caerphilly, South Wales, remembers the hardship endured by the coal mining communities during the Depression. 'Nearly all Welsh pits are very gaseous and dusty. Bedwas was no exception ... There was no money spent on safety ... Where the coal tipped into the tubs, dust was awful. That dust would blow back along the roadway and settle. It was rarely cleaned up ... Fine warm dust will burn like

petrol.' The reopening of private coal mining companies such as the Bedwas colliery by Barclays Bank in 1931 was a particular nightmare. When the men took strike action against the campaign of intimidation and harassment that Barclays conducted against the more militant sections of the workforce, the bank 'brought in their own union. It was an offshoot of the bosses union in Nottinghamshire, the Spencer union ... For the next four years it was hell on earth.' In 1937 the workers crushed the bosses' union by staging a sit-in. 'It was the first sit-in ever in this country, and it was the miners of Bedwas colliery who did it', Kenneth proudly explains.

Gladys Gibson worked as an investigator in the East End of London – and came up against the horrendous reality of British fascism as it targeted the Jewish refugees who had recently settled in the area. But the communist movement, she remembers with joy, articulated the working-class hatred of fascist ideology and large sections of the Jewish community joined with other anti-fascists to oppose Mosley's Blackshirts in the East London streets.

Living conditions in the inner cities were virtually intolerable. Sanitation was primitive, bare essentials such as food and clothing were in short supply and the domestic violence that this provoked was widespread. For many, the most humiliating aspect of the Depression was the means test. Families had come to terms with organising their economy around the pawnshop, but the means test was perceived as adding insult to injury. 'You were only left with the bare essentials. I bet, today, in some upper class homes, there are thousands of pounds worth of valuable goods stolen by the means test men from the poor in the thirties.'

However, the working-class solidarity that had become so evident in the workplace was also extended into the community and, in spite of the hardship, a concerted effort was made by all to retain the dignity and self-respect below which survival could not fall.

London   GRAHAM MURRAY

African Refugees: reflections on the African refugee problem

By GAIM KIBREAB (New Jersey, Africa World Press, 1985). 129 pp. $7.95

African refugees is not an ambitious book, and to that extent is successful, but, for the same reason, it fails to surprise or stimulate. The author works logically through his subject, starting with the causes and extent of refugeeism in Africa before, during and since, the colonial period. In the past couple of years, huge numbers have become refugees from drought and starvation, as well as from direct political causes. But

Kibreab makes no distinction between causes, as his interest is in what happens to refugees, not why they take flight in the first place.

The rest of the book is devoted to debunking two 'myths' about refugees in Africa. The first is that the situation of refugees is alleviated by their being settled among their 'co-ethnics' in other countries: Kibreab claims that this idea is based on the Eurocentric concept of African 'tribalism' as a more potent force than nationalism – a concept he rejects as plainly untrue. His arguments carry a lot of force, but he undermines them somewhat by using in their support an equally Eurocentric orthodox marxist analysis of African society which, to my mind, extrapolates from theory to reality. But he does provide cogent examples of how refugees have not benefitted from flight to their 'co-ethnics' in neighbouring countries, and have a stronger desire to return than settle in a new country among 'family'. Whether this shows a greater attachment to the present multi-ethnic nations of Africa, or just the strength of the pull to home, is a question of interpretation.

The second myth that Kibreab forcibly and plausibly argues against is that refugees are a separate and isolated problem that needs to be handled as such. Refugees are people with multiple problems, and can exacerbate hardship in the countries of asylum. Resettlement – if return is not possible – can only work where they are acceptable to the locals, which is, in turn, conditional on there being sufficient local resources – rare nowadays – and/or their bringing advantages to the local population. Refugees are classically exploitable, can depress local wage levels, push up prices, etc. The governments of the countries of asylum often have different perceptions from their populaces of the desirability of taking in numbers of refugees. Refugees can, in fact, be an asset to the country that receives them, but only if they are integrated, economically and socially.

I am left with an uneasy feeling about Kibreab's straightforward acceptance of current national boundaries. It comes down to what a refugee is: are the hundreds of thousands of Western Sudanese, displaced by hunger and drought to central Sudan, refugees? In his desire to posit multi-ethnic nationalism as the driving political force in Africa, he loses sight of the complexity of factors that may lead to refugeeism, and therefore does not give a whole picture of who and how many the refugees are.

His final thesis is that the countries of asylum need external help both from within Africa and from the rest of the world, and that such help, properly conceived and directed, can help turn refugees into an asset. Integrated in local settlements, they can provide positive economic and social input; isolated, they can be a burden and undesired.

Khartoum   MAURICE HERSON

Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas
By MAYA ANGELOU (London, Virago, 1985). 269pp. £3.95.

Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas is the third part of Maya Angelou's four-volume autobiography. It is a story of escape – 'I'm going to be a star, shining in the firmament of show business' – and success, through music and dance, and via her association with the 'greatest array of Negro talent ever seen', the cast of 'Porgy and Bess'. Although by this, the third instalment, Maya has survived the crippling effects of her childhood (rape by her mother's boyfriend left her mute for five years) and a tough, lonely struggle as teenage mother and sole provider (at one time as the madam of a whorehouse), her trials as a black woman in a white world are by no means over. At the same time as Maya jettisons herself into a search for creativity, she must steer clear of the racist images that engulf her, and threaten to define her as black artist. Is she a black 'clown', an object of white curiosity? Do the white men, who frequent the seedy night clubs where her career begins, dream of 'slipping into the slave cabin of young "hot mommas" and "ripping off a piece of black tail"'?

Music is the unifying thread that binds her story, and prevents it, on occasions, from dissolving into a series of rapid recollections. 'Music is my refuge. I could crawl into the spaces between the holes and curl my back to loneliness', proclaims Maya in her opening lines. And it is through music that she eventually comes to escape her hateful Southern background: she goes on a European tour, with 'Porgy and Bess'. But Europe isn't all it's cracked up to be, and besides, there is always a different reality calling her. Her son is growing up lonely and in trouble at school for voicing his anger at those who make 'the poor people go and bomb other people till they're all dead and live on dead people's money'.

Maya's first attempt to escape the drudgery of life – the need to secure a daily wage – is via the comparative security of marriage. But her union with a white man, a Greek, is doomed to failure from the start. And as her marriage steadily disintegrates, Maya finds refuge in the church. But what her husband, a committed atheist, fails to understand is that it is not so much God that Maya is looking for as the need for constant reaffirmation from the religious ceremony and the strength that the black congregation brings to her. Nothing could be sweeter than the sound of the spirituals and gospel songs; nothing could compare with the glorious feeling of the soul bursting through the body to find its incarnation in song.

Later, in Europe, Maya comes to a fuller understanding of the importance of music to her as a black woman. In the middle of Yugoslavia, she finds herself in a small backstreet musical store, surrounded by the shop-keeper, his wife, and a swarm of little and not so little children, all

staring at her intently. At first Maya is hostile — if they think she's some kind of talking bear, at least she's going to impress them with her Serbo-Croation. All of a sudden, the shopkeeper's wife starts to smile at her, knowingly. 'Paul Robeson', she whispers. When the family starts singing, Maya nearly collapses with the shock:

> Deep river
> My home is over Jordan
> Deep river
> I want to cross over into campground.

Maya joins in. The family know every word by heart, and by the time they finish, they are all hugging each other and crying. Suddenly Maya realises what a great and unique means of expression music is to her people. The universal language that they have fashioned from their anguish and pain has been a gift to Maya, as it will be to generations to come. For Maya, it is a 'heritage rich and nearer than the tongue which gives it voice'.

Institute of Race Relations   LIZ FEKETE

Government and Politics in Africa

By WILLIAM TORDOFF (London, MacMillan Press, 1984). 352pp. £25

Charting a course back and forth across the continent from the colonial period to the present, Professor Tordoff has compressed into a text of 300 pages a survey of African political life and its various academic interpretations. He has dealt with nationalist movements in the late colonial period, with the transition to independence, with the nature of the newly-emerged states and their political parties and administrations, with larger regional groupings like the OAU and SADCC, and with the role of the military, of ideology and of strategies of 'development'. *Government and Politics in Africa* is a conscientious and well-meaning book, a model of careful condensation.

Professor Tordoff is not out to rock any boats. He tacks carefully around the shoals of the 'modernisation' school and 'underdevelopment' theory, rarely venturing out of the shallows. His is a temperate spirit, which shies away from all 'extremes', and avoids the disagreeable as he judiciously mixes a little of opposing points of view to concoct his own outlook. Colonialism, in his view, was neither wholly good nor bad. Among its beneficial effects was its 'checking (if never entirely eliminating) inter-communal fighting' — no mention is made here of African lives lost in imperialist wars, and in resistance to imperialism. By the 1950s 'successive British governments seemed to be all too ready to shed themselves of the burden of African empire' and the French

were soon similarly disposed: why, it is difficult to say, since Tordoff again plays down African resistance, with neither Mau Mau nor the Algerian war getting a mention.

Mystification grows when Tordoff enters post-colonial waters. A self-professed 'democratic socialist', he acknowledges that 'the exchange between the developed and underdeveloped countries is unequal', but denies that Africa's 'underdevelopment is to be explained exclusively or even primarily in terms of the international capitalist environment'. He rightly shifts the focus from external constraints to the 'domestic political scene' to counter the tendency to see African countries as so many immobilised flies entrapped in the web of global capitalism. But in so doing, Tordoff appears to discount the existence of the web altogether. Neocolonialism plays no part in his analysis, and imperialism appears to have perished with formal empire. Instead, his ruling 'elites' attempt to assert direct control over the transnational corporations, as in Zambia in 1969-70. The far greater power of these corporations to resist being brought to heel by individual governments, and the way they turn nationalisation to their own advantage, does not appear in these pages; nor does the pressure placed on governments by finance capital, commodity markets, the IMF and World Bank, and western governments. The role of the United States figures hardly at all. The author does make a single fleeting reference to 'external manipulation (for example, by America's Central Intelligence Agency)' in the section on military coups, and touches on America's formal involvement by stating in three different parts of the text that Kenya has granted America the right 'to use in an international crisis the port of Mombasa and two air stations'. You would hardly guess from this that America had, in fact, carried out a massive re-structuring of Mombasa harbour, and that thousands of marines seeking 'rest and recreation' regularly invade the small Islamic town.

If American geopolitics have only a marginal part to play in Tordoff's scheme of things, so does that outpost of global capitalism, South Africa, whose depredations feature in only a few terse paragraphs. Professor Tordoff might well argue that in a text of 300 pages there is no space to deal with such issues. But are they really peripheral to his stated purpose?

In two stray passages Tordoff alludes to what should have been a fundamental part of his analysis – the 'generally hostile international capitalist environment' within which the 'Afro-Marxist states' have to operate, and 'the severe pressure to which African states have been subjected since the mid-1970s'. Having broached these topics, Tordoff lets them drop, choosing to evade the rapids which would have carried him into deeper waters. The result is a book which, for all its useful information and clear presentation, does little to advance our understanding of Africa's current predicament.

London

NANCY MURRAY

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This listing does not preclude subsequent publication of reviews.

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