Marx, Albright, Blair & Gates

by Srdja Trifkovic

Empire
by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri
Cambridge, MA:
Harvard University Press;
512 pp., $35.00

When the jacket blurb tells you that the book before you "basically combines a kojevian notion of global market as post-history (in this sense akin to Fukuyama's eschatology) with a Foucauldian and Deleuzian notion of bio-politics (in this sense crossing the road of a Sloterdijk who also poses the question of a coming techniques of the production of the human species)," you can be excused for dreading the task of reading it.

As it happens, going through almost 500 pages of Hardt's and Negri's often ponderous prose proved to be a rewarding, even eye-opening experience. It confirmed what I had always suspected: that there can be no alliance that goes "beyond the left and right" in resisting the globalist imperialism that seeks to destroy our culture, our history, our identity, and ultimately our humanity. With brutal frankness, the authors, intelligent and ruthless men of the left, allow that Empire is "bad" in its present form—violent, driven by the greed and hubris of the ruling elite—but they reject resistance based on an affirmation of human nature, family, nation, or any other form of traditional community. On the contrary, they want to channel the "enabling" potential of Empire into a post-postmodern world of their own liking. Ultimately, Empire is "bad" because it is not currently run by the likes of Hardt and Negri—but it must not be fought, lest that pleasing prospect be jeopardized.

The authors' opening description of the process of globalization is, on the whole, accurate. Globalization does not produce only global markets and circuits of production but a *global order*, a new logic and structure of rule, a new sovereignty. The process, while not spontaneous, is not dictated by any single center of rationality transcending global forces. The decline in the sovereignty of nation-states does not mean the decline of sovereignty as such; it "has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule . . . [that] we call Empire." This Empire should not be confused with "imperialism," which merely extended the sovereignty of European states beyond their boundaries. By contrast, Empire is a "decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm" with its hybrid identities and flexible hierarchies, eradicating nationalist colors of the imperialist map of the world and blending them in the imperial global rainbow. The creation of wealth within it tends ever more toward "biopolitical production, the production of social life itself."

Empire differs from imperialism in that it is not based in any one "nation." The United States does not form the center of the project, and America's apparently privileged position in Empire will not prevent its absorption by the emerging financial, cultural, and juridical networks. It goes beyond space and time and effectively suspends history: From its perspective, this is the way things will always be and were always meant to be. It is total, creating the world it inhabits. It not only regulates human nature but seeks to rule over it. Last, but by no means least, "although the practice of Empire is continually bathed in blood, [its] concept is always dedicated to peace." It "presents its order as permanent, eternal, and necessary."

Empire's designated enemies are at once banalized, reduced to an object of routine police repression, and absolutized as the Enemy, an absolute threat to the ethical order. (The book was finished long before the bombing of Kosovo, so the authors cite the Gulf War as an articulated example of the demonizing process.) Empire is formed not on the basis of force itself, but on the capacity to present force as being in the service of right and peace. The intervening authority can define "every time in an exceptional way" the demands of intervention and then deploy the rhetorical force of the media and the police force of "the international community." Supranational subjects, legitimated not by codified right but by *ad hoc* consensus, intervene in the name of any type of emergency or overriding moral principle. The rule of law is replaced by the legitimacy of universal values.

For all of Empire's powers of oppression and destruction, Hardt and Negri warn that we should not feel nostalgic for the order of yore, which to them was nothing but the "old forms of domination." The passage to Empire and globalization "offer[s] new possibilities to the forces of liberation," and "our political task . . . is not simply to resist these processes but to reorganize them and redirect them towards new ends."

For the authors, the emerging Empire is useful and necessary because it destroys the barriers to Hardt's and Negri's preferred eschatological model. It cleanses societies of the burden of traditional identity and clears the way for the eventual unleashing of the political energies of the multitude—the Third World multitude, to be precise. The new, globalized world makes the march of that multitude across "Western" national borders and the destruction of the host societies' construct (the present Empire) inevitable. And so the resulting new barbarism will not be the end of history, but the beginning of a better world:

> The new barbarians destroy with an affirmative violence and trace new paths of life with their own material existence. These barbaric deployments work on human relations in general, but we can recognize them today first and foremost in corporeal relations and configurations of gender and sexuality. Conventional norms of corporeal and sexual relations between and within genders are increasingly open to challenge and transformation. Bodies themselves mutate to create new posthuman bodies. The first condition of this corporeal transformation is the recognition that human nature is in no way separate from nature as a whole, that there are no fixed and necessary boundaries between the human and the animal, the human and the machine, the male and the female, and so forth; it is the recognition that nature itself is an artificial terrain open to ever new mutation, mixtures and hybridizations.

When such ideas, *made in Frankfurt*, first gained credence with the 1970's New Left, they had a utopian ring. The critical mass required to make the transformation possible could not be found within the West, while the revolutionary potential of the Third World proved repeatedly disappointing. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the out-

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look seemed pretty grim from the Marxist perspective, but—as Hardt and Negri point out—the end of the Cold War has cleared the way for the rise of global Empire, and with it the new hope that all may turn out well in the end.

This is the key message of the book. Hardt and Negri are true revolutionaries who want to move beyond the Gramscian "long march," which has yielded ample results but cannot deliver the *coup de grace*. In the apparent defeat of revolutionary struggle—epitomized by the triumph of liberal capitalism over bolshevism—they find the seeds of future victory for revolutionary Marxism, which Empire makes possible by eradicating traditional structures capable of making one last stand. Empire admittedly introduces new forms of capitalist command and exploitation, but it is "objectively" an ally of the revolution ("liberation") not only because it destroys the remnants of the old order but because it contains the germ of another form of globalization: the counter-Empire of global communism that will be made possible by demographic change. The "political subjectivity" that emerges within this phase of history is the most expansive and fundamental political subject of all: The multitude is about to come into its own.

In summary, Hardt and Negri rejoice in all that we abhor. Read *Empire* to understand why Karl Marx is alive and well and supports the emerging global order of Albright, Blair, and Gates.

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Lighting Out for the Territory

by Philip Jenkins

Restless Nation: Starting Over in America
by James M. Jasper
Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 275 pp., $25.00

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Restless Nation is an enjoyable exploration of the American national character. The book presents a plausible hypothesis, supported by the author's broad knowledge of the nation's history and social trends and illustrated throughout by aptly chosen literary references that reflect admirably wide reading. The problem is that, despite all these positives, I just don't buy the central argument, however much I have been forced to define exactly why I reject the basic notion of national restlessness.

James Jasper develops a familiar theme in the national self-concept, namely, the cliché that a country born on the move has never really ceased believing that a better life is to be found over the next hill. Insofar as there is a fundamental American myth, it is this national cult of restlessness, the faith in movement and change. From earliest times, Americans have believed that their real destiny lies somewhere else, where they will find the big break, the big money. Americans switch jobs and houses frequently, they change religions, they adopt new identities. Not for nothing is a very common type of indiscriminate religious enthusiasm known simply as "seeking."

And the concept of a nation of seekers is anything but new. As Tocqueville wrote in the 1830's,

> An American will build a house in which to pass his old age and sell it before the roof is on; he will plant a garden and rent it just as the trees are coming into bearing. . . . At first sight, there is something astonishing in this spectacle of so many lucky men restless in the midst of abundance.

The reference to "men" is appropriate, since Jasper stresses faith in movement as a distinctively masculine trait, one that appeals particularly to boys and young men. The shades of Huck and Jim are never far from the author's mind, but we could find countless other examples in culture high and low. Road films such as *Wild at Heart* or *Thelma and Louise* are obvious updatings of the Huck Finn myth, while Louis Malle's classic *Atlantic City* (1980) lovingly examines the world of those perpetual losers who have wandered to seek their fortune in this latest El Dorado. To take a sentence from a much-less-reputable film, Sam Peckinpah's *Convoy*, "The aim of the convoy is to keep on moving." For Jasper, this could be a national motto quite as valid as *E Pluribus Unum*.

Jasper sees restlessness and movement underlying political attitudes, the potent ideas of individualism and self-sufficiency that cause so much distrust of government. Indeed, American history has been shaped at least as much by its modes of transportation, its opportunities for seeking, as by its political ideologies. The successive societies created by the sailing ship, the Conestoga wagon, the steamboat, the train, and the automobile differed from each other quite as much as the eras so often described by merely political labels. This is especially true of urban life. As Thoreau wrote in the 1850's,

> Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, New Orleans and the rest are the names of wharves projecting into the sea (surrounded by the shops and dwellings of the merchants), good places to take in and to discharge a cargo.

Forty years later, another observer might well have described the cities of that era as chiefly rail depots, while modern cities have been shaped by the automobile. And the nature of American cities has another interesting connection to national restlessness, since the lack of an overwhelming metropolis such as London or Paris prevented the kind of total concentration of wealth and talent that occurred in other lands. People were thus encouraged and enabled to spread out over the continent.

Incessantly on the move, America has always been a nation in the process of renewing itself, a process constantly reinforced by successive waves of immigration. Though migration has occurred since the dawn of humanity, Jasper stresses both the astonishing volume of American immigration and the fact that it has never dried up, not even in the years of the most strict legal controls. And immigrants, he stresses, are by definition wedded to notions of novelty and rootlessness. They have a natural comprehension of the idea of constant flight, constant seeking, the fresh start. As D.H. Lawrence explained, "That's why most people have come to America, and still do come. To get away from everything they are and have been."

From the national characteristic of restlessness, Jasper moves on to describe what he sees as the negative consequences of the phenomenon in terms of anomie and lack of connection, and to wonder whether Americans are ready now to grow up and settle down. To a substantial degree, he explains mobility

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