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THE ANTIWAR MOVEMENT: GOFF, HAYDEN AND AN ADMONITION FROM FRANK BARDACKE

By ALEXANDER COCKBURN

I hope we are witnessing the omens of larger and enduring resistance in the antiwar movement. No doubt about it, the people are turning against the war. The Bush crowd are truly on low ground, and the political levees are starting to crumble. They feel it in Congress.

Already there are private meetings, both sides of the aisle, evolving new positions on the war, exit strategies and so forth. Waiting in the wings are impeachment inquiries, hearings on Bush's low balling of the casualties, the lack of body armor. Once Bush's base starts to crumble these matters will move center stage.

Right now there's a big argument going on about exit strategies and schedules from Iraq. Cindy Sheehan and many say Out now. Then the responsible politicians say, Be realistic. Start to leave at the end of 06. Stan Goff took a few lusty swings at Tom Hayden on our CounterPunch website, on this very matter of scheduling. Goff duly got attacked as being (a) nasty and abusive, and (b) being divisive and unrealistic.

I wrote Stan a note, as follows:

"There's nothing wrong with vigorous invective. The left doesn't get places often because it's way TOO polite, too reluctant to air differences... I looked at the Progressive Democrats of America site last week and saw a parcel of shredded platitudes about internationalizing the occupying force. You were quite right to make fun of that kind of blather. This "internationalization" line reminds me of the prudent line back in 2002 and 2003, before invasion, when a lot of peo-

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Return to Flint A Workers' Dystopia

By MICHAEL DONNELLY

I was visiting in Michigan this July. Along with the usual outdoor activities and the family reunion, I took the opportunity to take my Salem, Oregon-raised son on a trip to the old neighborhood in my hometown of Flint. As fate would have it, the day the soon-to-be-college kid and I arrived for our Springsteen moment in the sweltering birthplace of modern Trade Unionism was also the day the AFL-CIO started its annual convention in Chicago.

So the news reports were dominated by stories of how the Service Employees International Union and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters were officially defecting from the AFL-CIO, citing the misleadership of John Sweeney and the unending hemorrhaging of union numbers over the past two decades.

In a country where one out of every three private sector jobs was once held by a union member and now but 8 per cent of those jobs are union, I couldn't help thinking that all Sweeney and his colleagues needed to do was to visit Flint where they could see why others have lost faith in them.

Flint was and is the quintessential company town. Chrysler, Chevrolet, Nash, Champion and Buick all started in Flint. General Motors, the world's largest corporation when I was growing up there, was the main employer and had a hand in every aspect of public life in Flint for decades. The corporation built entire neighborhoods and health clinics for its workers. Community schools started in Flint. For the first time, schools were open for community activities on nights and weekends. One of the first Junior College to Community College transitions also

took place there. Once upon a time GM felt that educating its workers and their children was good business. At one time aspiring education administrators all wanted a stint in Flint on their resumes. GM also thought it a good idea to require its executives to live within the city limits.

Of course, all this came about after the key event in American labor history – the 44-day sit-down strike of the nascent UAW.

Before the Depression there were 470,000 auto workers. By 1936, that number had shrunk to less than 230,000. Wages also dropped off – from \$40 a week to \$20. The average annual take-home pay for an autoworker was around \$900 at a time the government determined that \$1,600 was the minimum amount a family of four could live decently on. Working conditions were quite dangerous. Safety gear nonexistent. Serious injury was common. Workers weren't even allowed to speak in the lunchroom. Average executive GM pay was \$200,000 per year; equivalent to \$5 million today.

On August 26, 1935, auto workers organized the United Auto Workers (UAW). GM refused to recognize the new union. Taking a cue from successful European strikers, the UAW launched the Kelsey-Hayes sit-down strike in Detroit. After success there, union leaders Walter and Victor Reuther and United Mine Workers president John L. Lewis of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) headed to Flint for the main event. In quick order, a number of strikes were carried out. On November 18, the UAW struck a Fisher Body plant in Atlanta. On December 16, two GM plants in Kansas City were shut down, and on December 28, a Fisher (Flint continued on page 4)

ple wrapped up the antiwar message in talk about a UN force. Very polite, and totally unrealistic, since the UN is a wholly owned subsidiary of the US.

"We aren't, thank God, a fascist country here, like Germany was in WW2, but suppose the Germans had been able to speak freely, would they have been talking in 1942 about a withdrawal of German forces from the Soviet Union beginning at the end of 1943? No, by mid-'42 any sane German would have been saying AUS NOW. And they would have been realistic, because by the end of '43 most of the German soldiers were dead or captives. Do you want to tell all those US soldiers sent to Iraq that they should ride around in their Humvees waiting to get blown up till the end of 2006 when withdrawal can commence on a schedule that preserves PDA credibility. If so, they'll have a lot of explaining to do, to mothers like Cindy Sheehan."

Hardly had I fired this off to Stan, before I got a remonstrative note from Frank Bardacke in Watsonville, my political consigliere on many issues. Frank has plenty of credibility, not least in the area of antiwar organizing. He was one of the Oakland 7, arrested and tried after the attacks on the Oakland induction center in the late 60s. He's a very radical guy.

Bardacke said...well, hell, I'll give him the stage.

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"Alex: Goff is very clever and much of what he says is absolutely true but I don't think he shows much sense about what an anti-war movement is like or how we could create a situation where in Goff's words 'We make the political cost so high in the US for continuing the war that it threatens the entire US state with destabilization.'

"In a mass movement against the war a lot of people are going to do a lot of different things. That's what a mass movement is. Some people are going to pass out mealy mouthed petitions; some people are going to go to weekly vigils; some people are going to go to big marches; some people are going to think about supporting anti-war candidates; some people are going to try to counter military recruiters at high schools; some people are going to try to stop military supplies from leaving the US for Iraq. All of it together is what makes "the political cost so high..." not just the radical action in the streets and schools. And it is the overall shift in opinion against the war which makes the more militant action powerful; otherwise the radicals are easily isolated and ignored.

"Things are beginning to change and Cindy had a lot to do with it. But one of the reasons that her action has been so effective is because the American people are turning against the war, as are even some sections of the media. Hayden's petition itself is an indication that more and more folks are looking for ways to end the war. In that respect it is a good sign. It doesn't prevent more radical deeds; and despite its proper sounding nonsense it may even help create an atmosphere in which more radical action is welcomed.

"That's the way it happened in the movement against the war in Vietnam. There were years of big moderate marches and liberal petitions before shutting down induction centers and military mutinies became a popular alternative among large numbers of people. And it was the whole thing together which put limits on the US ability to wage the war in Vietnam.

"Look. We have a tough task. It is much harder to build an anti-war movement when there is no draft. Not entirely, but to a large extent the anti-war movement was not an act of solidarity with the Vietnamese, but an act of self-interest by hundreds of thousands of young men who did not want to fight, kill, and die.

"It is going to be very hard to get the US out of Iraq — even harder, I believe

than it was to get the US out of Vietnam. Vietnam was geographically on the periphery, and had no important natural resource. Iraq is at the center of the political world, and, of course, there is oil. Furthermore, as your brother pointed out, great powers can not suffer small losses.

"Any loss becomes a big loss. The folks who call the shots in the US (Democratic and Republican politicians and the people above them) are not going to leave Iraq until they are forced to. I think it is going to take a long time. We can't force them out; only the Iraqis can. But we can put limits on their ability to wage the war.

"Actually I think we are doing well. Our vigil in Watsonville is lively and growing. We hear that the vigils elsewhere are too. During the vigil people planned a successful effort to get the school district to make it easier for parents to block the military recruiters from talking to their children. People also go into the local high school and speak against the war. Folks sign petitions, write post cards, argue politics, make sure that everyone knows about the next big demonstration. Sure, we aren't blocking the street yet. But you don't start out blocking the street. You block it when there a good number of people who support you. And building that support takes all kinds of work.

Goff is right. We are for immediate withdrawal. We are for immediate withdrawal because it is US troops who are provoking a civil war; it is not the presence of US troops that prevents one. And all the calls for something less than immediate withdrawal—including Hayden's—confuses that question. And so it is right not only to support immediate withdrawal but to argue against some kind of staged, limited withdrawal, like the one proposed by Hayden. But at the same time we welcome everyone who is now moving against the war, and we encourage them to do everything they can to stop it, even if it is not exactly what we think is the best thing to do.

Well, that is a lot of words Alex. Maybe I could have just said this to Goff about Hayden: Back in the day we always welcomed the presence of opportunists. It meant that they sensed that within our movement there were opportunities.

Frank

Footnote: these reflections ran in my CounterPunch website diary, but I'd like our newsletter subscribers to have them in hand. AC. CP

The Poor, the Kleptocrats and Disasters

Mexico 1985 - New Orleans 2005

BY HEATHER WILLIAMS AND MIGUEL TINKER SALAS

If there yet existed doubts that that the American political system fell far on the other side of the line dividing democracy from kleptocracy, the televised specter of tens of thousands of people waiting for water, food, and evacuation from New Orleans in the wake of Katrina surely sunk those beneath black water. Today citizens interested in reestablishing a system with civil liberties, reasonable oversight of public finances and verifiable elections would do well to remember a disaster in Mexico which eerily parallels the tragedy in New Orleans, and in which impromptu rescue brigades became a powerful civic movement for democratic change.

Twenty years ago, on September 19 and 20, 1985, a series of earthquakes, including one measuring 8.1 on the Richter scale, leveled much of the center of Mexico City leaving upwards of 5,000 people dead and over 40,000 injured. Thousands of buildings were destroyed instantly, and tens of thousands sustained serious damage. In the immediate aftermath of the quake, an estimated 800,000 people were left homeless as water mains failed, gas lines ruptured and buildings caught fire. Even communication with the outside world was cut off, as the city's central switchboard was crushed in a dilapidated building.

Like Katrina, this was the disaster that scientists and engineers had predicted. Both New Orleans and Mexico City are audacious bets with nature: New Orleans grew great and beautiful behind levees, sinking lower each year, unreplenished by sediment from the Mississippi; Mexico City had been built in a drained lakebed with unstable mud and clay foundations crisscrossed by faults.

The more ironic parallel, given Americans' greater stated confidence in their government than Mexicans', is the official response to these disasters. In the aftermath of the earthquake, desperate citizens needing medical care, housing, and rescue services waited frantically

and found to their horror that help from the government never arrived. The help that did materialize in the immediate aftermath of the disasters came from heroes whose names we will never know: volunteers and reporters in small boats going house to house in New Orleans; neighborhood brigades digging through wreckage with their bare hands, or the so-called "moles" who crawled into eddies and cracks looking for survivors in Mexico City.

In both cases, governments failed to evacuate danger zones, to assess immediate possibilities for rescue of buried or injured people, to locate the displaced, to unite families separated in the chaos, and to set up clearinghouse services for

casualties and faced the greatest losses to their homes and neighborhoods. New Orleans' working poor lived in ramshackle wood houses in low-lying areas; Mexico City's quake victims tended to live in dilapidated high rises made of substandard materials. Now, flood victims would do well to ask themselves precisely what Mexico City's victims did two decades ago: with a federal administration keen on cutting back social services, health care, and housing for low-income families, what in fact will be rebuilt? Will it be casinos and restaurants or homes and hospitals?

Indeed, in Mexico City, amid economic crisis and government budget austerity, it was unprecedented civic

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people who would need long-term assistance finding housing and rebuilding their lives. What is more, disasters revealed taxpayer-built institutions hamstrung by cronyism and politics. Finally, the public face of both disasters featured out-of-touch officials declaring that they and they alone would take control of the situation, going so far as to block aid from non-federal entities where it was offered.

In Mexico's case, vital emergency aid from abroad was rejected; in New Orleans, vital shipments were turned away by Federal Emergency Management Agency officials and soldiers who finally arrived on the scene spent more energy pointing guns at reporters than delivering help to the survivors.

Perhaps the most sobering commonality in both disasters is what they revealed about poverty, geography, and official priorities. In both cities, the poor suffered the greatest number of

mobilization that drove reconstruction of destroyed health care facilities, schools, and apartment buildings

The parallels between Mexico City in 1985 and New Orleans in 2005 are ones that most Americans don't want to draw. After all, the Mexican government was at the time an authoritarian state riddled with corruption and dominated by a single party, whereas the American system is presumed by many to be an inclusive democracy and a model for other countries.

What the voices of the delta revealed last month, however, is that there is not quite as much distance as one might imagine between Mexico then and the United States today. CP

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