

Ian Harris

The family disintegrates under the impact of corporate expansion

Only one of every five families in the U.S. conforms to the "husband/working-wife homemaker" nuclear model that has been a dominant pattern for so long. Social policy planners, service workers, church groups, community residents and even members of the establishment are all expressing concern about the changes in the American family.

As researchers Zaida Giraldo and Jack Weatherspoon of the Center for the Study of the Family and the State at Duke University commented in *Newsweek* (May 15), "All Americans must become aware that the 'ideal' family barely exists and will never return as a significant force in American life."

A variety of people are seeking scapegoats to explain this phenomenon. Male supremacists perceive that men are losing power over the family domain because of the changing roles of women. They blame the women's movement. Right-wingers indict "relaxed moral standards" as illustrated by the legality of abortion, the availability of contraception, and the adoption of sex education courses in schools.

Liberal strategists like John L. McKnight, associate director of the Center for Urban Affairs at Northwestern University, suggests that the best thing government could do would be to stop intervening in families. He and others see parents as increasingly powerless in the face of governmental interference in their lives, which they see taking place through the welfare establishment, the public schools and the whole plethora of social service institutions that liberals have supported.

Arguments that the authority of families has been taken away by the government and given to professionals and specialists—to counselors, social workers, and psychiatrists—see the growth of social services, health care, and public education as responsible for robbing parents of their traditional roles as job trainers, teachers, nurses and nurturers.

The development of family life.

Although there is great diversity in anthropologists' understanding of early family life, human beings are thought to have originally lived in tribal units. Within these groupings the individual family had a limited role. The needs of the individual

U.S. 1977 million			
HUSBAND AND WIFE FAMILIES 6.3 MILLION		SINGLE-HEADED FAMILIES 3.2 MILLION	
NO CHILDREN UNDER 18 1.1 MILLION	WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18 2.6 MILLION	WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18 5.3 MILLION	
	BOTH PARENTS WORKING FULL-TIME 11.4 MILLION	FULL TIME WORKING MOTHERS 3 MILLION	
	HUSBAND ONLY WORKING FULL-TIME 11.4 MILLION	FULL TIME WORKING MOTHERS 3 MILLION	
	HUSBAND ONLY WORKING FULL-TIME 12.4 MILLION	FULL TIME WORKING FATHERS 4 MILLION	
	NEITHER PARENT WORKING 1.1 MILLION	NONWORKING FAMILY HEADS 1.9 MILLION	

were taken care of by the community as a whole. Women banded together to assist at birth. Old people were nurtured by the group. Children were looked after collectively, etc.

As Europe became industrialized, people began to turn to the notion of romantic love, and family units began to see themselves as separate from the larger communities in which they lived. This separation was further enforced by the division of labor brought about by industrialization. Under these arrangements the extended family where mothers and fathers would live with their aunts, uncles, parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, and even cousins became the dominant mode of living and child-rearing. Although many people who came to America from both Europe and Africa were not able to bring their entire family with them, the extended family soon established itself as the most common family unit in the new world.

In the U.S. the extended family still exists in a few urban communities that

have been able to maintain a strong ethnic identity, but now represents only a tiny fraction of family units.

The extended family suffered its greatest setback in the 1950s with the invention and development of suburbs. The suburb became big business for real estate agents, construction firms, and land speculators.

In addition, large broadcasting corporations like ABC, CBS, and NBC found they could generate tremendous revenues by selling the image of a nuclear family living by itself in its own household. Advertisers such as G.E., Zenith, Philco, Sears, and other corporations were able to make people feel inadequate if they didn't have a well-kept lawn, a two-car garage, immaculate kitchen, a color T.V., the latest range, a dishwasher, a washing machine, and all the other paraphernalia portrayed as essential for "the good life." Such advertising and the way of life it projected made nuclear living the dominant mode of family life in the U.S. during the '60s.

In the 1970s the construction industry



began to experience the limits of growth, and large advertisers started to look for new ways to generate profit. As Barbara Ehrenreich has pointed out, the new image of the American woman is no longer one of the woman staying home and spending her life cleaning house and looking after children but rather one of the successful career woman with an attache case under one arm, and a tennis racket under the other.

Such images have generated whole new leisure industries with indoor tennis clubs, saunas, sports equipment, vacations and trendy shopping centers. These images have changed the role of American women and consequently of the American family, by making it much more desirable for women to work outside the home, and for people to lead single lifestyles.

In its unending quest for profits the capitalists in the U.S. will sell whatever image promotes their products. Witness what has happened to adolescents. Teenagers used to be looked after within family units, but somewhere in the 1950s the "teenage market" started to generate a whole series of products. The record and movie industries also reinforce the image of adolescents as a market separate from families.

Likewise with nursing homes: Senior citizens were taken away from the extended family, and isolated as a large market that could generate profit for health care providers.

Corporate capital has also affected traditional mores through the use of women's bodies to sell everything, and huge amounts of capital have been generated through the liberated lifestyles espoused by such enterprises as Playboy.

In 1978 teenage pregnancy accounts for 20 percent of the total births in the U.S., a statistic that can directly be related to expanded notions of morality that have been promoted by movies, television, radio, newspapers, and other forums of culture and media. Sociologists who describe this phenomenon say that many teenagers who become pregnant are seeking to create their own families, although they are most often poorly equipped to assume these responsibilities.

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Alan Snitow

A strategy for the left in the 1980 election

Working in the news department on one of the Pacifica stations, I've come up against a problem you may also be wrestling with: It doesn't seem enough to provide news and commentary—that does little more than say what most people on the left now realize—we need a "re-groupment" of political forces, an "anti-corporate political movement," etc.

Local and regional coalitions, involving labor, the left, minorities, community groups are fleeting. They form briefly around an issue and then dissipate as each group follows its own interests. Usually, the coalitions are beached on their narrow focus or their local limitations.

How to create an effective and stable coalition? A possible strategy, a left race in the presidential primaries, has been in the wind for some time, but I have not seen any reference to it in the left media.

One of the people who might consider such a race is Rep. Ron Dellums (D-CA). In 1976 he was nominated for President by the National Black Political Convention. Dellums declined the nomination, not because he was against running for President, but because it was not time.

Perhaps, the time has come. In a recent interview with Pacifica Radio, Dellums said people have asked him to run in the primaries and he is "seriously considering" doing so.

Dellums said the aim of a campaign by himself or by some other leftist should be to challenge Jimmy Carter on the issues and to create a focus and national voice for a broad-based left coalition. It would not be a political party; nor would it function as a left wing of the Democratic Party (although I can imagine it might mobilize the party's Kennedy wing to defend itself from its left). Instead, it could become the "arena" for left political action by socialists and the many progressive people in the U.S. who find the political spectrum defined by Jimmy Carter, Jerry Brown, Jerry Ford, Ronald Reagan, and Howard Baker unsatisfying.

California, for example, is becoming a state in which political life is becoming a series of right-wing political graffiti: Bakke, Jarvis-Gann, Briggs, and so on. As IN THESE TIMES has noted editorially, the response from leftists has been completely defensive. The labor movement

seems politically paralyzed. Just a few days after Jerry Brown vetoes a tiny "cost of living" increase for public employees and welfare recipients, the California Federation of Labor endorses him with little dissent, although considerable grumbling.

As for the left media, we have lots of grist for good analysis, saying Jarvis-Gann is the end of the welfare state and the New Deal or that Bakke "breaks the compromise on racial equality embodied in the 60s civil rights acts." But such interpretation falls short of action.

The absence of even a "lesser evil" for 1980 because of the move to the right by all major political figures is a major opening for the left. Let's fill it in a public way with a left political campaign.

The Black Political Convention and UAW president Douglas Fraser's recent statements indicate readiness for some action of this kind. At its recent convention, the League for United Latin American Citizens heard a call from its president for a boycott of the governor's race in California because of Brown's support of Jarvis-Gann. Eduardo Morgan was thrown out as head of LULAC because

such a boycott fails to deal with one of the few modes of mass political expression in this society. However, his boycott call indicated a much broader disaffection with Brown among Hispanics, a rapidly growing section of the population long assumed to be in Brown's pocket.

Although many leaders are in various politicians' pockets, rank and file members of these constituencies are not. The restlessness of the leaders is a symptom of their "adjustment" to a more important process in the base.

A left presidential campaign is a fine place to raise the questions we need to debate and answer in a public arena: What is a socialist transitional program for the U.S.? How do we create an ongoing socialist political and organizational "center" not confined to single campaigns or issues? How do we deal with the Democratic Party?, etc.

Pacifica Radio, IN THESE TIMES, and other left media should be pleased to open their pages and their airwaves to those debates.

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PERSPECTIVES

□ FOR A NEW AMERICA □



Sanctify the family since new forms proved useless

By Michael Lerner

The growing right-wing-led assault on gay rights and on the women's movement cannot be fought merely by outraged cries of "fascism" and pleas to defend "civil liberties." We need to ask ourselves, "What is the program of the right speaks to needs that are legitimate and reasonable?" and then offer our own programs that are even more to the point. We must look beneath the irrational shell (even when that shell smells of national chauvinism, racism or sexism) to understand the deeper human needs that are going unmet and that have been displaced into irrational avenues, so that we can address those needs in progressive and humane ways.

The current attacks are primarily based on the growing emotional insecurity that faces most adult Americans. The breakdown of family life is an area in which the oppression of women has been institutionalized, but the breakdown of fam-

ily life in the U.S. has not led to a significant decrease in oppression. On the contrary, a new marketplace in people and "relationships" has emerged with new forms of oppression, every bit as painful as the old.

The omnipresent possibility of families being torn apart has generated a new level of insecurity throughout all levels of the society. Not only must consumers worry about keeping up with the latest cosmetic and clothing styles, but also with new forms of emotional self-improvement and "growth" lest they be deemed a less marketable quantity for relationship fulfillment. Whether as a single or as part of a "relationship" (married or not), most people under 45 (and many over) are continually feeling and resenting the instability that characterizes social life today.

As a psychotherapist, working primarily with working class and poor people, I see this pain in its concrete manifestations. The loneliness, fear, isolation, and despair that characterizes social relation-

ships today, and the pervasive distrust that pervades so many relationships (and that is encouraged by psychotherapies that teach people always to put themselves first) are the psychic legacies that the new right plays upon. No longer simply an apologist for capitalism's excesses, the right has begun to champion the psychically oppressed.

But how can the right plausibly use this issue to attack the left? The women's movement, gays, and the left did not cause the breakdown of the family. And if there is one piece of wisdom shared now by most of those who passed through these movements, as well as by those who opposed them, it is this: The attack on the family was misguided and personally destructive. The testimony to this conclusion is most passionately given by those who participated in the campaign: by those who tried to build alternative lifestyles. By and large the communal experiments have failed, the attempts to build "new forms" were found to be useless, and the people who went through them now talk about having "grown up."

But the popular impression, shared by millions of young people who were on the periphery without really understanding the internal sophistications of the movements against the family.

Given this popular impression, it is relatively easy for the opportunists of the right to manipulate mass sentiment against the left, and to use the attack on gays as their springboard to plausibility as the champions of the emotional needs of the people. And it is relatively useless to protest that it's really capitalism's fault, not ours, that family life has broken down, when at the same time we seem to be cheering that breakdown.

Similarly, it is useless to point out that in a future society there will be different sets of social arrangements to substitute for the family as the provider of long-term emotional security. This is a good point to make in discussing the kinds of changes we want to see in the future, but it is not a program that speaks to people's needs today. We all need transitional forms, forms within which we can live and build our emotional lives in the present.

Socialist-feminists and other progressives should campaign in defense of the family and in the face of the assault upon the family by the market rationality of capitalist society. It is time for us to declare loudly and proudly that socialists and feminists can make the best defense of the family. Community-controlled day care, for example, can remove one of the greatest threats to the family: the difficulty of raising children outside the context of the extended family relationships of the past. Precisely by allowing for the reproductive rights of women can we eliminate the potential of families being broken up by unwanted children and the tensions they cause. And by redefining the roles of women in the family we can guarantee equality of power and prevent the development of the psychological strains that most often lead to the dissolution of relationships.

In short, what is being suggested is a full-scale defense of the family and the sanctity of sexual-emotional relationships, but the family as now redefined to require full economic, emotional and social power of women.

I use the word "sanctity" with intent. Human relationships are the most precious and meaningful events in life, and they cannot be taken for granted. As against the logic of the marketplace of relationships, we must stand for the sanctity and specialness of relationships. If sanctification has in the past been associated with a patriarchal tradition, it is time for us to create a new set of traditions in which we publicly sanctify non-hierarchical and non-patriarchal relation-

ships, and publicly commit ourselves to protecting, supporting and nourishing those relationships. This does not mean that we are against divorce, but that as a community we tilt towards the possibility of working relationships out before people opt to dissolve them. Of course, this working out should be in a context of granting full equality to both partners, but it may also mean that we work patiently through the old hangups and sexist conditioning. Our tilt towards relationships need not imply disrespect for those who have chosen to remain single. As for those who are single not of choice but because they cannot find a suitable partner, our tilt implies a community responsibility to assist people in meeting others, a responsibility that grows out of an awareness that loneliness is a structural reality for many Americans.

Support for the family requires a cultural milieu in which those who struggle to maintain long-term relationships, raise children, and build families are given real help. For example, we should focus on creating educational and entertainment events for children, so that parents have alternatives to Disneyland and TV. We need to create public space where people seeking to meet each other can do so, without having to be apologetic or feel embarrassed that they are single and don't want to be. And we need to create an ethic of responsibility so that those without children are expected to give active support towards the financial and social well-being of those who are raising children.

The idea of support for the family does not mean support for the patriarchal family nor does it mean making compromises with the struggle against sexism. What it does mean is that we publicly acknowledge the wrong-headedness of the direction we were previously espousing, and now develop an approach to the family that actually speaks to the real daily lives of the people who can be our allies if we don't automatically write them off as our enemies.

To start with, let's talk honestly. Those of us who have tried to abolish the family have failed. Most of us have now created some form of family with positive aspects that we value. Instead of each of us sliding into these relationships a little ashamed that somehow we are selling out, we need to create a new attitude of celebration for the value of building long-term relationships.

I do not underestimate how difficult this will be for many of us. Many of us grew up with firsthand examples of families that were oppressive and stultifying. Some of us have not forgiven our parents or parents of friends for staying in these families, and the very word "family" conjures unhappy sets of childhood experiences.

But it is time for us to let go of these experiences. We may have needed to go through the period of rejection of the family to set up a climate that would make it possible for a different kind of family life to emerge. Without idealizing what is possible today, without minimizing the vigilance and struggle that will still be necessary to keep from falling back into older and more oppressive patterns, we need to give up our fear that we will be "coopted" or deflected if we now identify with a mainstream sentiment in the U.S.

It is time to create a national organization or coalition called "Socialists and Feminists in Defense of the Family." By focusing public attention on our new attitude towards building lasting relationships, having and raising children, we might shake up many of the dominant myths in American politics that help isolate progressive forces. Such a movement would be in a far more powerful position to support gay rights, as it must, because it would be able to speak as a force that is committed to the very emotional stability and security that most Americans reasonably want. It would be able to say that people are mistaken to think that gays are a cause of family insecurity or of relationships being less stable today than they seemed to be in the past. Such an approach would help separate off from the right a segment of its support, leaving its irrational and anti-human dimensions more clearly exposed. ■

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