

To prevent nuclear holocaust we need to think the unthinkable

As the Mobilization for Survival forges ahead with its spring offensive (sit-ins and arrests at Rock Flats and Barnwell, demonstrations for the opening of the UN Special Session on Disarmament, etc.), some activists are asking "What makes people reluctant to get involved in mass political action to get rid of nuclear weapons and reverse the arms race?"

I believe that one of the chief obstacles is psychological. The thought of nuclear holocaust is so terrifying to most people that they don't want to participate in actions that would force them to imagine nuclear war. Many people who are working against nuclear energy have told me "I can't deal with nuclear weapons, I feel too helpless. Getting rid of a reactor is a manageable problem."

There is a taboo against speaking about the likelihood of annihilation, even though this likelihood is rapidly increasing. Only 35 years ago, nuclear weapons had not yet been invented, and the world's major powers could fight with all their force for five years without causing permanent damage to the ecosphere. Now, nuclear weapons are about to spread to many countries, and a nuclear war could wipe out our species, and perhaps life itself on this small planet. Human consciousness has trouble grasping this ever-accelerating terror.

The U.S. invented nuclear weapons, used them twice, has led in the development of more sophisticated weapons and delivery systems, and still is the leading arms merchant to the rest of the world. Americans in 1978 are living with and supporting this terror. Yet most pay taxes and vote without wondering whether the bombs bought and the officials elected will hasten the end of history. Most prepare for the future without obvious worry about whether there will be a future. Only the declining birth rate, perhaps, indicates a deep-seated concern about whether children would have time to grow up and old.

Robert Jay Lifton, a psychiatrist, is one of the very few people to wonder about and study this nonchalance. Since 1962, he has worked with survivors of the Hiroshima atomic bombing, trying to understand how human beings cope with immersion in death, the loss of hope for immortality, and the threat of extinction. He has identified a mechanism which he calls "psychic numbing" and says "it operates for individuals toward all weaponry, toward all dangers to the environment, and all events ultimately involving death... An inability (or unwillingness) to open oneself to the human consequences of technology, so common in this age, is one of the fundamental obstacles to dealing reasonably with nuclear weapons..."

People have always had to face what Vonnegut calls "plain old death"—individual death; that is hard enough. Comfort comes from connection with the past, via ancestors and history, and connection with the future, via descendants and a sense of contributing some good work or influence. This sense of continuity is now gravely threatened. Vulnerability to annihilation as a species is new; it divides living people from previous history; the sense of symbolic immortality via connection to the future is jeopardized. We are all haunted by the specter of Armageddon. It robs our actions of meaning. A mushroom cloud of anxiety shadows our life-choices.

People have myriad ways of avoiding awareness of this anxiety: forgetting, denying that the bombs will ever be used, spacing out with drugs, or commodities. Some tell themselves that the Russians will conquer us if we don't continue the arms race (as if the Russians were invulnerable to radiation). Some believe that the leaders must be trusted (this one works poorly, since Vietnam and Watergate). Some decide that they can't do anything about the situation anyway, so they may as well ignore it. Most people keep themselves too busy pursuing individual goals to think much about our collective fate. Many believe that thinking about nuclear

war is morbid, antisocial, and even a sign of mental illness. Some concentrate on more familiar, unthinkable, and limited evils—like racism, or pollution, or monopoly capitalism—all important, but still, not dealing with the new and horrible possibility of total extinction.

We must stop psychic numbing, and quickly. It is crazy and antisocial *not* to worry about nuclear holocaust, and it is sane and responsible to think, speak, write, and demonstrate against the weapons that make holocaust possible. We render ourselves powerless by refusing to imagine extinction, and thus refusing to imagine what we can do to avoid it. Individuals may be powerless but the American people collectively have a special ability and responsibility to prevent life on earth from being snuffed out.

People need to break the social taboo against discussing Armageddon. A process of consciousness-raising must take place, in which people discuss their fear, their nightmares, and their despair with family, friends, fellow-workers, and fellow citizens. Then we will be able to comfort each other, share our sources of hope and strength, explore creative ideas, and join together for change. The Mobilization for Survival will only work if people face reality, and pool their forces to fight the forces of death.



Hans Koning

Ain't Misbehavin'—exercise in white nostalgia

Ain't Misbehavin', the musical about Fats Waller or rather about his songs, opened on Broadway to 35 raves and not one sour word. Or so the ads state; I haven't counted the reviews but if it says 35, I'm sure it's 35. The fact astounds and bewilders me.

This show, put together by Richard Maltby Jr., has—before the curtain goes up—the gloss, the electricity in the audience, which in Manhattan go with real success. The music is great. I ain't a music critic, anyway. The audience is standard Broadway audience, East Side, Central Park West, Westchester and Connecticut. When I was there I saw two black faces in all of the stalls, but as they were in house-seats, I'd guess they belonged to actors, or anyway to show business people. They loved the show. The audience loved the show. They sniggered about sexy allusions. They cheered the dancing and singing.

And yet this is the most appalling step-and-fetchit production to go on the stage since *Gone With the Wind* packed them in and Shirley Temple had a lill' black six-

year-old as her personal maid. This isn't an Uncle Tom show—oh no, it goes back a couple of decades before that. This is an exercise in white nostalgia for the fine days when Negroes stayed on the stage or behind pianos and bars and white folks who cared to mix with them went to Harlem after show time and enjoyed them in their natural habitat.

I'm not being pedantic here or bleeding heart or anything like that; there isn't a shadow of a doubt when you watch the whole, the show and its honky audience reacting to the show, that that is what all this is about. Somehow they've found some black people to sing, "Why am I so black, and blue?...I'm white inside," (and sing it beautifully, of course), and the folks who are white in and out clap their white hands with delight at this proper sentiment; they'd thought they'd never hear those soothing words again in their lifetimes. Up yours, Stokely.

I don't think Neil Carter and the rest of them are renegades. With eight out of ten actors and actresses out of work, who's to blame them? Maybe they're

apolitical, as they used to say during the Viet war. Maybe they don't give a damn. Maybe they're really white inside. Who cares? What astounds and bewilders me is that nobody, not one critic, not one black man or woman, has so far even voiced a modicum of discomfort. I mean, this is "Springtime for Hitler," but without the jokes, and blacks instead of Jews.

As I said, I'm not writing about music here. If anyone wants to know, I love Fats Waller. If he lived now, he'd be different. But apart from that, Maltby has directed his show to caricature even the Wallace words and tongue-in-cheek attitudes of 40 years ago: his men in their pseudo-elegance think they look like elegant white folks, ha ha, his women are so ugly in their distorted sexy outfits that no suburban theater-goer need have an uneasy minute in his or her bed that night: here's no threat to anything they do or don't do or believe in. These men and women on the stage are so different from "us" that they'd be welcome to scrub our wives' or husbands' backs in the bathtub without a second thought.

Is this how integrated, sophisticated New York in the year 1978 *really* feels about the races?

And a couple of blocks farther north in a little theater another black play, "The Biko Inquest," is on the stage. Or was at the time of writing; I wouldn't be surprised if it presently died a quiet and respectable death. Even on opening night many a seat gaped empty; and during the intermission and afterward I didn't hear a word about the play or better, documentary report, among the public. Presumably that first night audience had already seen *Ain't Misbehavin'*, they were doing their liberal duty listening to the inquest in Biko's murder, and what more was there to be said? "Are you going to Easthampton this weekend?" "Have you seen that Chaplin thing?"

Biko, who was bludgeoned to death in a South African police station, and "I'm white inside," within walking distance of each other. We can accommodate anything in this city, and it doesn't spoil our after-theater dinners, either.

EXPOCUBA '78

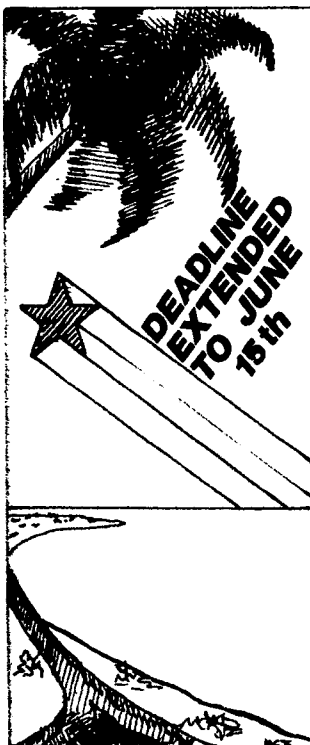
A call to artists ages 10 years to adult to enter original poster designs on themes appropriate to: The Cuban Revolution, Cuba-U.S. ties, or Cuba and the Third World, in this first contest-exhibition dedicated to developing friendship between U.S. and Cuban people.

Awards will be given to those posters chosen by the Selection Committee made up of nationally known artists, and other persons familiar with Cuba. The Grand Award is an expense-paid trip to Cuba and an opportunity to meet with Cuban artists and participate in people's art workshops. . . . plus three additional prizes of \$200 and an original work of Cuban art.

A selection of the posters will become part of a national exhibit which will tour the United States and Cuba. For more specific information, write: EXPOCUBA '78, P.O. Box 609, North Amherst, Massachusetts 01059.

DEADLINE FOR ALL ENTRIES: JUNE 15, 1978

(Sponsored by the Venceremos Brigade)



CATALYST

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES

TABLE OF CONTENTS Volume I, Number 1

- Towards a New Age of Social Services: Lessons to Be Learned from Our History
- Black Organizing: The Need for a Conceptual Model of the Ghetto
- Social Welfare in Capitalism: A Socialist Analysis
- Radical Therapy: A Gestalt Perspective
- Social Workers, Class, and Professionalism
- PLUS other features, news, and book reviews

RATES (4 issues)

Regular: \$10; Unemployed: \$6; Institutional: \$20; Sustaining: \$25

Make checks payable to:

INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL SERVICE ALTERNATIVES
Department AM
P.O. Box 1144 Cathedral Station
New York, N.Y. 10025

By Peter Marcuse

Conflicts in the U.S. today are not those predicted 40 or 60 years ago. The experiences of 1848, the Russian Revolution and post-World War I turmoil in Europe and the Great Depression in the U.S., led to the expectation of broader worker/management conflicts, aggressive labor parties actively seeking political power, increasingly radical demands for an economic restructuring of society starting with the work-place. But despite the militancy of miners, copper workers, teachers, particularly at the rank and file level, the AFL-CIO is a bastion of the established order. No labor party is even on the horizon, and pressures for work-place changes seem to come as much from bankers, taxpayers, or mine-owners as from workers.

Yet conflicts there are plenty. IN THESE TIMES reports on 25,000 squatters in Mexico City forcing the central government to concede their rights to their illegally occupied housing sites. Groups such as ACORN in Arkansas and Mass Fair Share and the Campaign for Economic Democracy in California, or the work of public interest groups and co-ops or anti-nuclear campaigns abound. So do alternative policies for state and local government and consumer issues of all sorts.

These are not old style class conflict. "Urban conflicts" might be a better name for them. "Urban conflict" would also be a better word for the bitter public struggles of the '50s: the ghetto revolts, welfare rights clashes, urban renewal protests, even many of the conflicts around environmental pollution. Have these "urban conflicts" replaced those between worker and employer as the most critical conflicts in society? Have residential location, housing, education, environment, consumer protection, "quality of life," replaced class as the source of fundamental social change? Are they related to the traditional class cleavages? What are their long-term political, social, economic implications?

Some exciting, albeit difficult new theoretical work is being done on these questions, much of it in Europe. Manuel Castells and a group in Paris have done pioneering work; others in France, Italy, England, and Spain have contributed. Their approach has centered around examination of the actual struggles of the urban social movements that participate in them. Several books have recently appeared that make their work more accessible to American readers: Castells' *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach* (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, 1977), Christopher Pickvane's *Urban Sociology: Critical Essays* (Havstock Press, 1977), and Michael Harloe's *Captive Cities* (Wiley, New York, 1977).

IN DEPTH

Urban conflicts transforming the class conflict

Conflict now takes place in the streets, rather than in the factories, Castells argues.

Three types of explanations have been put forward in recent years to explain the new order of conflicts: "new class theories," "fiscal crisis theories," and now "urban movement theories," such as Castells'. The lines between them are not sharp, and they share many concerns, such as with the role of the state or the issues raised by critical theory, and many contributions do not fall within any explanation, but the categories are helpful for a first overview.

New class theories argued that, while the relationships of production were still key to social conflicts, the classes arrayed on each side could not be simply described as workers and capitalists. The specific relationships of professionals, managers, students, white collar workers, those engaged in unproductive as well as productive labor, racial minorities, women, artists, had to be considered. Not only the proletariat, but many other groups had structured interests opposite to those of the capitalist class. And the capitalist class was often significantly divided.

Fiscal crisis theories highlighted the changing role of the state. James O'Connor and others (i.e., Union of Radical Political Economists) have argued that the state is taking over many functions previously privately performed, or not previously needed, both in the sphere of production (accumulation) and in the political/social/ideological arena (legitimation). These expanded functions, ranging from mass transit, highways, and urban renewal through vocational education and health services to welfare payments and food stamps, require vastly expanded state expenditures. These in turn require expanded tax revenues, and no one, whether

coupon clipper, business executive, small homeowner, salaried worker or wage earner, wants to pay higher taxes. So political crises follow one upon the other, the New York City fiscal crisis being typical. At the economic level there is doubt whether the kind of growth required by monopoly capitalism can take place with this new shift of functions and resources, from the private sector to the state, even though that shift was required by monopoly capitalism itself.

"Urban social movements" is the name given by Castells to the organizations and activities that lead to "qualitatively new effects on the social structure."

While Castells' approach is not inconsistent with that of some of the new class theorists or the fiscal crisis theorists, Castells focused on the consumption-end of the productive process. "Collective consumption" is the term he uses to denote all those goods and services provided publicly for collective consumption: parks, roads, health care, education, public services, community facilities. "Urban conflicts" he then defines as those centering on collective consumption, and he sees their importance growing as the importance of collective consumption grows. While they are linked back to the classic relations of production, because collective consumption is necessary for the reproduction of the labor force, the origin of these conflicts is at the consumption end. They take place in the streets, rather than in the factories. The picketing is at municipal offices more often than at corporate ones.

What are the potentials of such urban conflicts? On one level analyzing concrete

conflicts, Castells tries to be very precise. Success or failure will depend on carefully, almost fussily, defined categories: the size and nature of the "stake," the "social base" of the movement, the "social force" that spearheads it, the organization directly involved, whether the tactic used is mobilization or negotiation, whether initial confrontations result in victory or defeat, whether the "conjuncture" of other events is favorable or not. The categories may be more carefully defined than their actual use warrants, but they lead to fruitful analyses: In *The Urban Question* he discusses the FRAP in Montreal, squatters in Chile, new towns in England, urban renewal in the U.S., the "urban reconquest" (renewal) of Paris.

On the longer-term potentials of urban conflict, Castells is also incisive. His theoretical analysis leads him to conclude that urban conflicts not linked to workplace conflicts will ultimately be only reformist; to produce "non-reformist reforms" (Gorz' phrase) linkages of urban conflicts to direct production-related issues and movements are crucial.

His case studies don't always prove his point, and some even contradict it; but the evidence is incomplete. "Successes" are hard to find. Allende's Chile is a painful and ambiguous one; the Russian Revolution antedates the growth of collective consumption; urban issues were not dominant in China, or Cuba, or Vietnam. The situations more likely to lead to "successes" now are indeed those with which Castells is directly politically linked: the activities of the left parties in France, Italy, and Spain. Castells is close to Carillo and most of the left parties in Europe link urban conflicts with basic national political and economic changes. "Anticapitalist coalitions" and the "political class struggle" rather than the simplistic ideas of worker-capitalist class struggles underlie the new strategy. We may know the outcome better shortly.

In the meantime, Castells' work, as well as that included in the Pickvane and Harloe books, and the ongoing U.S. work (for which David Harvey's *Social Justice of the City* and James O'Connor's *Fiscal Crisis of the City* were seminal, and Alkaly and Mermelstein's collection, *The Fiscal Crisis of the Cities* is one of the best recent collections) are coming to grips with issues of immediate political importance. Urban conflicts are here and now, and regardless of their ultimate outcome, activists will be involved with them on a day-to-day basis. These writings help highlight the issues, the forms of organization, the linkages, that are most promising of success.

Peter Marcuse teaches urban planning at Columbia University.

IN CHICAGO

The Midwest's largest selection of Marxist and leftwing books and periodicals. Many titles in Spanish & German. 20% discount on all new books. Mail inquiries are welcome. 11 to 7:30 p.m., 6 days (312) 545-3667

Guild Bookstore

1118 W. Armitage, Chicago 60614

ADVERTISEMENT

IMPEACH BRZEZINSKI

Making a Big Move?

Then make a small one, too. Send us your new address with your old address label. And we'll make sure that your subscription to IN THESE TIMES is uninterrupted.

New Address

Address _____
City _____
State _____
Zip _____

BEHIND THE SCENES

IN TWO WORLDS

The People and the State in the German Democratic Republic and the USA

by Elaine Mensh & Harry Mensh

Examines democracy and the state, advocacy and criticism, the status of artists, intellectuals and working people, the issue of women's equality, attitudes and practices regarding racism in a socialist and a capitalist state.

ORDER FORM

Enclosed is \$_____ for _____ copy(ies) of BEHIND THE SCENES IN TWO WORLDS.
☐ paper \$4.95 or ☐ cloth \$15.00. Please include 50¢ postage and handling charges for each book ordered.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Mail to Dept. T1

INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS

381 Park Avenue South • New York, N.Y. 10016

Sustain Us.

In These Times has begun a drive for sustainers—interested supporters who are willing to contribute regularly to help us meet our expenses.

We have established an initial goal of 100 sustainers who will contribute an average of \$15 each month. We are far from that goal, and we are asking you to help us attain it.

Please send whatever amount you can.

I will be a sustainer.

I've enclosed my first month's pledge, and will send _____ a month.

☐ I'd appreciate a reminder from In These Times the first of the month.

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send to: In These Times

1509 N. Milwaukee Ave.
Chicago, Ill. 60622