

sure it's taxed.

Incidentally, I think Jack Kemp and some of those folks might reach the same conclusions I have on income tax. It is highly unfair, ridiculous, and the storm clouds are gathering over the tax system which one day will wash it away. It's going to erode faster now, as a result of the new tax bill. In 1960, corporations paid 23 percent of the U.S. income tax. By 1985, they'll pay 7 percent. And you know, there are only two groups who fund America: people, and the corporations who employ them. If corporations don't pay taxes, people make up the difference.

And if you look at the rules and regulations, there isn't any greater burden placed on the American people than the burden to fill out their tax forms for government. We've turned what should be a very simple civic duty into an enormously complex burden that you have to pay experts to help you with. I just dread starting on it myself.

You're saying that if we changed the tax system, we could reduce rates and have enough money to run the country?

Well, we'd destroy one of the most incredibly wasteful industries that has ever been built in the United States, and that's the tax-avoidance "paper industry." We could start training more engineers and fewer lawyers. That's the direction the Japanese are going in. The maxim of a

Is our tax system worth saving? A moderately progressive income tax, with no exemptions, would be fairer.

good tax system ought to be that it is simple and fair. We now turn what ought to be a simple civic duty into an incredible nightmare for people and business. It is really stupid. There are no discussions about fairness. We actually start with the contention that it is unfair, and then go on to use the tax system to stimulate behavior by this or that group. Look at the president. He's going to create urban-enterprise zones by using the tax system. Here is this fellow who is a great believer in the free market and what's his plan for American cities? To use the tax system to persuade corporations to do things they might not otherwise do, by giving them tax benefits. What I'm saying is that we should step back from all of this to a level of incredible simplicity: we've got a government, and we've got to pay for it. The government produces certain things, military goods, transportations, education, medical services. You have to pay for it. The questions are who pays, and how? It can be done very simply. And I don't know whether there is a constituency in Congress, but I know there is a constituency for that across the country.

We never debate on the floor of Congress the extraordinarily large budget represented by tax expenditures. We argue about whether to spend \$10 million for this or \$10 million for that. But we never debate whether we are going to give \$10 million in tax expenditures to Exxon, money which the company otherwise would have to pay. And once that tax expenditure to Exxon is passed, it becomes part of the tax law and remains there forever. It becomes another part of the lawyers' and accountants' relief program. And concurrent with building those volumes of the tax codes, we also fill the enrollments of the law schools and accounting schools. The Japanese, meanwhile, are training engineers and scientists to build better products, and we're wondering why we're getting beaten in the international markets. ■

Alexander Cockburn and James Ridgeway are columnists at the Village Voice, where a longer version of this interview first appeared.

PERSPECTIVES

Deterrence is a mean illusion

Michael Parenti

THE GOVERNMENT IS PREPARING to spend hundreds of billions over the next few years to strengthen our nuclear defense system, but the truth is, there is no such thing as nuclear defense. Nor is there such a thing as nuclear deterrence in any strict meaning of the term.

Military technology changes the nature of war, including the offense-defense balance. In World War I, the machine gun was the unanswerable defensive weapon, leading to the bloody stalemate of trench warfare. In a nuclear world war defense will disappear as both belligerents attack almost simultaneously.

There are cold war intellectuals who made their careers writing scenarios for nuclear war. Let's join their macabre company for a moment: Suppose the United States were to strike first, destroying 99 percent, or all but 40, of the estimated 4,000 Soviet long-range warheads in their silos. Such a strike would constitute an incredible victory in a conventional war, but with nuclear weapons it is not good enough. Those remaining 40 warheads, some of which have an explosive force 600 times greater than the Hiroshima bomb, along with another hundred or so launched from Soviet submarines would deliver an unfathomably catastrophic retaliation upon the American people.

The non-defensive nature of our nuclear system is no better illustrated than in the way the citizens of Utah opposed the installation of MX missiles in their own backyard, and the similar opposition expressed by Europeans to the installation of new warheads in their countries. If those missiles were to defend them, as a fort might defend us from a band of Apaches, then they should have welcomed such weapons. Instead they act like people who know this "defense system" threatens their security and diminishes their survival chances. Here is a new and strange development in the technology of war: we are endangered by our own weapons.

For the nuclear strategists, the best defense is a strong offense; or more accurately, a strong offense seems to be the

only defense. Defense is achieved by provoking in the minds of one's enemy the anticipation of an obliterating retaliation. This process is called "deterrence." But in the absence of any traditional military defense, how does deterrence work? How does one know when the other side is deterred? Even if they have no intention of starting a war and announce, "We are deterred," how do we know they are not lying in order to put us off guard?

There are other troublesome questions: how do we distinguish between defensive and aggressive measures, since both entail the same military build-up? (Even the construction of bomb shelters by the Soviets, a seemingly purely defensive expediency, is treated by some U.S. strategists as a sign that the USSR is preparing for aggression.) And if either side appears too ready and willing to use its doomsday weapons, will not that heighten the possibility of a desperate pre-emptive attack by the other?

In any case, how can we place our faith in deterrence when our leaders do not? When Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger talks like a man who is convinced our present deterrence capacity makes almost no impression upon the Soviets, and when he announces that the Soviet military build-up "over more than 21 years" is evidence of their conviction that the next war is "winnable" and this "assumption...underlies all of their thinking," and when he says there is a "serious and very imminent danger" of a Soviet military threat, what are we to make of this? If our leaders are of this mind, what chance is there for peace?

The ironic thing about deterrence is that while purportedly a realistic policy that refuses to place naive trust in the enemy, it actually rests on a fragile system of mutual trust—a trust that both sides accept deterrence, that both are in fact deterred and that both believe the other is deterred. *For deterrence is predicated not so much on what is real as on what we think is real.* That is why the bellicose posturing and incessant anti-Soviet rhetoric issuing from the Reaganite leadership are so frightening to so many people here and abroad. The belligerency upsets not only the balance of arms but the more encompassing psychological balance needed to keep both sides assured of

the peaceful intentions of the other—and thus deterred.

On several recent occasions, in 1979 and 1980, military computers erroneously indicated that the Soviet Union had launched submarine and land-based missiles against the United States. In each instance, those in command refused to call for a retaliatory strike because they knew better than to believe the "evidence" produced by their multi-billion dollar alert systems. They rose above their strange technology and fell back upon their personal notions about political reality.

But these notions are shaped by the political climate they live in, by the opinions of peers, the warnings and cries uttered by leaders, and the impressions gleaned from the media. In today's climate, when Dr. Strangeloves in high places fill the air with the talk of war and with images of an impending Soviet aggression, what will be the reactions and instant judgments of those otherwise sane but fallible persons who preside over an insane and fallible technology, and who must in a matter of minutes decide whether to blow up the world?

The people need their own "deterrence force." They cannot trust leaders, be they Democrats or Republicans, who walk out on SALT talks, who push for ever greater arms escalations, who refuse to sign a pledge not to be the first to use nuclear weapons, leaders who ignore the Soviet proposal to ban nuclear weapons from outer space, and who believe in the winnability of nuclear war but who then, for propaganda purposes, ascribe this grotesque view to the Kremlin.

Peace and security will come not with MX missiles and neutron bombs but with the continued growth in the international anti-war opposition that is so visible in Europe and emerging in our own nation, causing the Reaganites to retreat from their self-tantalizing preoccupations with war. Peace is assured only when we can create a genuine climate for it. A determined, active, mass movement for detente and mutual disarmament is our best hope—our only real deterrence. ■

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Michael Parenti is a visiting fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies and the author of books and articles on American political life.

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IN PRINT

AMERICAN CULTURE

Left historians take the pulse of people's history



Radical History Review. BHP/Minnie Conn.

The BALTIMORE VOICES project raised questions about the accuracy of oral history.

Presenting the Past: History and the Public

Radical History Review,
445 West 59th St., NY, NY
10019

No. 25 (October, 1981), 192 pp.
\$5 (annual 3-issue subscription
\$14.00)

By Alfred Young

With this issue devoted to "Presenting the Past: History and the Public," the eight-year-old *Radical History Review* initiates a double task: "to report on, learn from and assess the diverse products of the 'people's history' movement of recent years," and to offer "critical analysis of the myths and distortions that are offered as history," whether from scholarly sources, "TV docudramas, corporate funded museums [or] Hollywood extravaganzas."

They are off to a superb start. The critiques are sophisticated, well-researched and pungent.

Equally refreshing, the assessments of "people's history" challenge assumptions, contributing to a long-overdue dialogue about its goals.

What are the sources of the "myths and distortions"? Not so much the far right, several essays suggest, as the assumptions of liberals and conservatives. TV docudramas, Eric Breitbart points out, are brought to us not only by network moguls and corporate sponsors but by producers with liberal credentials like David Susskind and David Wolper who feel that upbeat endings take precedence over historical accuracy. Wolper and Warner Communications for instance plan a docudrama of the novel *Hanta Yo*, which Patricia Albers and William R. James argue convincingly is "the story of John D. Rockefeller in a war-bonnet" with scant resemblance to Sioux life.

America's two most popular outdoor museums, Greenfield Village and Colonial Williams-

burg, Michael Wallace makes clear in "Visiting the Past," were developed and controlled by the Fords and Rockefellers respectively. Others have pointed out the way Colonial Williamsburg "pickled the past." Wallace draws a sharp bead on the way its presentation consciously reflected the conservative values of its sponsors. When Williamsburg finally "discovered" slavery, it set the story of the slave alongside that of the planter in a framework of "pluralism" that shied away from class relations. Another version of this pluralism is the Smithsonian Museum's "Nation of Nations" exhibit, which Barbara Melosh and Christina Simmons contend, in glorifying America's many ethnic strands, results in "the denial of persisting inequality" and "the invisibility of gender."

The three major articles on "people's history" focus on oral history. Because history and memory is peculiarly fractured in

contemporary American life, Michael Frisch points out, "the process of historical memory is itself a subject for memory." Marcel Ophuls' documentary film of Frenchmen remembering (and distorting) the Nazi occupation, *The Sorrow and the Pity*, and Studs Terkel's *Hard Times*, properly understood as a "memory book" of the Depression, cope with this problem. Some left historians, on the other hand, assume "that once the people can be put in touch with their own history," their "false consciousness" will be dispelled. Oral history, argues Frisch, cannot be "presented for consumption as if its meaning was self-evident."

Sonya Michel raises the same question of the three deservedly popular films based on the oral histories of women workers and women organizers, *Union Maids*, *With Babies and Banners* and *Rosie the Riveter*. Accounts by oral history subjects can be "partial, fragmentary, idiosyncratic and sometimes—deliberately or unintentionally—misleading." The filmmaker as historian therefore has to devise techniques that will "locate" testimony critically in an historic context. She asks questions other viewers have raised—how representative were the women who were chosen? What were their political ties? What were the links between the left and the labor movement? Lyn Goldfarb of *With Babies and Banners* concedes that the "tension between what was historically accurate and what was visually best" was resolved on occasion in favor of what was "appealing."

Linda Shopes confronts with candor the problem of community residents as oral historians based on her experience in the Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project. "What do we mean when we say we want people to do their own history?" she says. Do we want what historians or the people think is important? And what is the best way of "re-

turning" such history to the neighborhoods? The project created a well-received play, *Baltimore Voices*, performed by professionals but devised no mechanism to follow up the "half-formed feelings and ideas that might have been roused by it."

Other articles call for closer attention to children's history books (some are breaking out of the stereotypes, writes Joshua Brown), and to the professional "public history" movement (perhaps more diverse than portrayed by Howard Green). And there are reports—unfortunately too brief to be instructive—in a section called "People's History Around the World."

Working in different fields, the essayists contribute to a much-needed vision of common goals. We need projects, writes Frisch, that will help people make their memories of the past "active and alive as opposed to mere objects of collection." Michel, a filmmaker, calls for films that "stimulate critical consciousness," and not only pride. Local history projects, Shopes argues, will have to "link up" with community organizations if they are to have a continuing impact. And if museums are to convey a sense of "human agency," write Melosh and Simmons, "we must appeal to the viewer as a historical actor, not as a spectator or hero worshipper."

If *Radical History Review* can sustain this quality in its ongoing efforts, it could build for the U.S. what its sister journal, *History Workshop*, has done for Britain: a movement that brings into dialogue the many people who are hammering out "alternative" histories.

Alfred Young teaches history at Northern Illinois University. His most recent article, "George Robert Twelves Times, 1742-1840: A Boston Shoemaker and the Memory of the American Revolution," is in the October, 1981 William and Mary Quarterly.

Drama

Continued from page 24

They may evoke in an audience's consciousness the need for analysis but they don't set out as one.

I feel that people know what is true and what is not true. I don't believe that TV is used as moving wallpaper—people are still making discriminations and judgments. Eighty to 90 percent of what is put out, including and perhaps especially news on current affairs programs, tell lies. It is, therefore, a left playwright's duty to tell the truth, to talk about issues that are systematically denied an airing in the media.

I've just written a play called *Country, A Tory Story*. In it I'm working within what we in England call the country house genre. The play is set during the election months of 1945. I take an upper class family of brewers and examine the struggle for power that goes on within that family. At one very important level it works like a family saga, but at its most potent level it is a critique both of a class and of a genre. It's complex, both Chekhovian and Brechtian. You draw people in along the line of the genre and then you demolish the myth of that genre, and leave people stranded, and they have to regroup. So it's an interesting and upsetting process.

Comedians work that way as well. People thought in the first

act that they were there to get some cheap laughs at the expense of these people and then they suddenly found that every time they laughed they were being punished for it. They were forced to look at the content of their laughter, at its ideological meaning.

OCCUPATIONS takes place in Turin in the 1920s and features Gramsci. Is this play an affirmation of Gramsci's position?

It's a critique of socialist humanism. It is Gramsci who is beaten by the end of the play; not Radek (the agent of the Comintern). I've set two valid, ideological stances at maximum tension, set them vibrating through the play as they vibrate through my life. The Leninist principle and the Gramscian principle still have terrific resonance on different parts of my person, imagination and sensibility. I'm looking for a dialectical transformation of those two positions into one.

Who was the major intellectual influence on your work?

Well, Edward Thompson lives a life of real scale. He's a big man who has got social forces charging through him, just like John Reed. I met Edward in 1957 when he was working on *The Making of the English Working Class*, and he's been a major influence and close personal friend since then. He's the man I admire above all others in my life.

Al Auster and Leonard Quart are New York writers on cultural affairs whose work has appeared in *Cineaste*, *Socialist Review* and other places.