

By Zijiang Ding

**S**INCE 1949, THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF China has adopted a temporary constitution—the 1949 Common Program—and four other constitutions—in 1954, 1975, 1978 and 1982. But for the most part, these documents have not functioned as fundamental law. They were violated or ignored arbitrarily by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders. But the 1982 constitution seems to build the framework for a complete and effective legal system.

In order to avoid disasters like the Cultural Revolution and to get a more stable and constructive environment for national development, the Chinese—from top leaders to ordinary people—desire an efficient and practical constitution. And, indeed, the new constitution has given people hope, although there is still widespread skepticism about its function and effect.

**Academic debate.** Before its adoption, important arguments over the new constitution occurred among scholars who represented different factions in the Chinese Communist Party. Premier Deng Xiaoping saw the ills of the Chinese political system to be "bureaucracy, excessive concentration of power, the patriarchal system, the life tenure of cadres in leading posts and special privileges of all sorts."

A radical reformer, Liao Gailong, who worked at the Central Policy Research Office of the CCP, argued in his 1980 Reform-plan that Mao Tse-tung's theory of democracy—democracy as a means, not an end—was incorrect. Democracy is both a means and an end, Liao insisted. It can be considered the final goal of socialism.

Liao emphasized both democracy and efficiency as justification for separating party and state. But in 1980 Liao could not have expected his ideas to be realized in the 1982 constitution.

Party theoretician Wu Jialin, in an article in *Red Flag Journal* entitled "How Can We Make the National People's Congress Function as the State Power Organ," pointed out that in order thoroughly to separate party and government, we must alter two existing principles—"the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China commands the armed forces of the People's Republic of China," and "the chairman chooses the premier of the State Council (SC) upon the recommendation of the party."

Similarly, Feng Wenbin, the vice-head of the Organizational department of the CCP, claimed that "in order to develop socialist democracy and realize state political democratization, we must put into effect the separation of the party and the government."

Owing to the limitations of the times and their political status, all reformers who emphasized separation of party and government agreed that their aim was to make the party leadership more important. Indirect party leadership that is political rather than organizational was their goal.

These reformers' plans were obviously limited, giving no hope that the party will be completely separated from administration in the foreseeable future.

**Putting reforms into practice:** The 1982 constitution seems to have defined a limited separation of party and state. But moving those provisions from paper to practice will not be simple. Such progress

## A historical look at China's constitutional framework



Premier Deng Xiaoping

is contingent on the ability of the National People's Congress (NPC) to fulfill its role as the highest organ of state power. According to the most recent document, the NPC standing committee wields more substantial power than before.

But limitations remain. Indirect elections prevent the people from electing even the members of the NPC, let alone the chairman and other members of the NPC standing committee. The chairman is still an important member of the CCP Politburo.

A significant step forward in the 1982 constitution is the adoption of direct elections at the county level for the local people's congresses. Direct election with decentralization of power should enable local participation in political, economic and cultural management. This mechanism also is supposed to complete the institutionalization of local legal systems and portray the will of the people to the central authority. It is useful to prevent local bureaucrats from deceiving their superiors and deluding their

### A significant step forward in the 1982 constitution is the adoption of direct elections for the local people's congresses.

subordinates. The pity is that this mechanism has only functioned on a very limited scale.

A real separation of the party from the government hinges on whether the State Council (SC) can really function as the highest administrative organ of the state. With the party intervening less in administrative affairs, the council will certainly increase its power. Several other factors strengthen the role of the SC. One is the development of the economy, which requires a more powerful executive branch. Another is the deletion in the new constitution of all provisions that allow the party to intervene directly in government affairs,

and the addition of explicit new functions and powers. Although the SC is under the supervision of the NPC and its standing committee, the NPC standing committee has no power to remove the premier and his cabinet members.

But whether the SC can be effective depends on the prestige of the constitution in the political system, and the personal prestige of whoever is premier.

**The judicial branch:** No real separation of the party from the government can occur until the Supreme People's Court (SPC) becomes the highest judicial authority. The 1982 constitution not only restores two principles—-independent judiciary and subjecting only to law—but also adopts a new principle, that courts are not subject to interference by administrative organs, public organizations or individuals. But the so-called independent judicial branch is ultimately responsible to the NPC. It must be subordinated to the party's leadership. It must meet the needs of the special political movements launched by the party, and also yield to some social pressures. A difference between Western judicial independence and the Chinese judicial independence is that the former emphasizes the independent judge, and the latter the so-called independent court.

For a long time, the People's Republic of China's communist theoreticians criticized the Western doctrine of separation of powers. According to them, this doctrine was nothing but "a downright bourgeois fraud," "no more than an instrument facilitating the capitalist rule," because "in reality, the administrative power was higher than anything else and was totally under the control of the monopoly of the capitalist class." But in 1980, some reformers put forward different positions. They believed that the theory of separation of powers and the principle of checks and balances were historical steps forward—and that their practice in the West, especially in the U.S., has proven effective and positive.

**Separation of power:** The 1982 constitution adopts a new "system of the separation of six powers" under the supervision of the NPC and finally under the leadership of the CCP:

- (1) Legislative power: the NPC standing committee—the standing body of the highest organ of the state power;
- (2) Administrative power: The State Council—the executive body of the highest administrative body of the state;
- (3) Symbolic power: the presidency—a nominal figurehead;
- (4) Military power: the Central Military Commission—the highest command of China's armed forces;
- (5) Judicial power: the Supreme People's Court—the highest judicial organ of the state;
- (6) Supervisory power: the Supreme People's Procuratorate—the highest supervisory organ of the state.

Comparing the separation of powers in the People's Republic of China with that of Western countries, these differences

emerge

First, all powers are checked by the CCP single-party leadership which, as the highest organization of the proletariat, is above everything else and commands everything else. Second, all powers must become tools used by the people's democratic dictatorship, a weapon that protects the socialist system. Third, all powers must emerge into a general power—the NPC, which not only serves as a legislature but also commands and supervises the executive and the judiciary under the party leadership.

**A milestone:** The new constitution itself is a milestone in the development of China's political system. The 1982 constitution eradicated all postulates and provisions born in the Cultural Revolution and in many respects is a return to the postulates of the first constitution.

So far, China has achieved significant successes in economic, political and social reform since 1976, although it always moves forward three steps, and then backward two steps. To be sure, there still is a limit to all these reforms and changes. University of Chicago Professor Tang Tsou points out, that "although the trend toward the increasingly deep penetration of political power into society has been reversed, China is only beginning its transition to a post-totalitarian society. This process of transition may well be halted or even reversed." But the common aspiration of the people is to continue to make social progress. That is an irreversible trend.

Zijiang Ding is a visiting scholar from Beijing at Northwestern University.

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By Lawrence Swaim

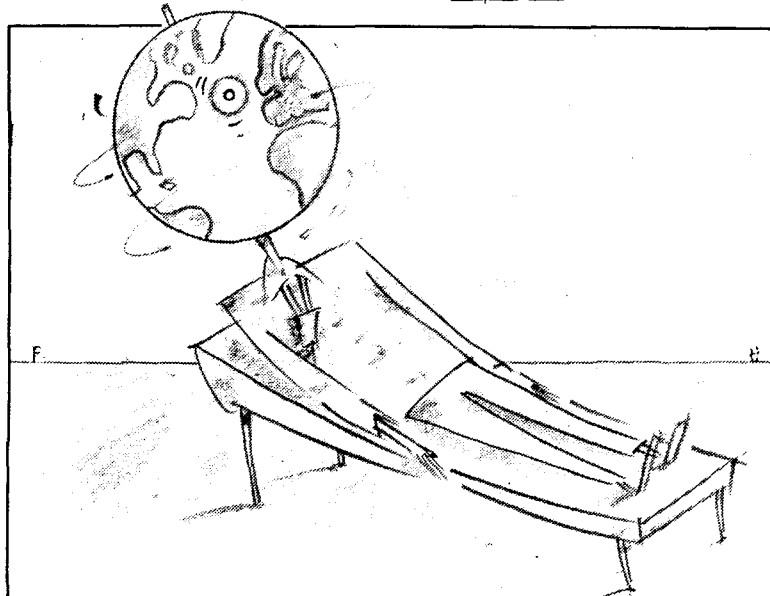
**M**SCOTT PECK IS NOT EASY to pigeonhole as a writer or as a thinker. One of the most popular and successful speakers of our time (\$6,000 plus expenses per appearance), he is simultaneously an opponent of the nuclear arms race, a Christian evangelical, a psychiatrist, an inspirational author and an extraordinarily idiosyncratic thinker. Is he part of the solution or part of the problem?

Peck's first book, *The Road Less Traveled*, is one of the most popular books ever written, sales doubling every year from 1979 to 1985, when it assumed the No. 1 position on the *New York Times* paperback bestseller list. Its central message is also the first line of the book: "Life is difficult." People who try to run from their problems end up making them worse, and also frequently end up mentally ill. (This idea is little more than a variation on one of Carl Jung's concepts, one which Peck acknowledges early in the book: "Neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering.")

Health comes from legitimate suffering; discipline (by which Peck apparently means self-discipline) is the key, when it is motivated by love. Evil is real, and occurs in the form of laziness, or spiritual entropy, which drags the seeker down and prevents growth. In Peck's system, mental health is a form of grace, in the sense that grace is understood in traditional Christian theology.

Like Jung, Peck also tends to equate God with the unconscious mind (as in Jung's theory of the "wise" unconscious, which supposedly possesses a preternatural knowledge). Thus whatever the subconscious mind is saying is probably right. But which instinct is God, and which isn't? (Jung's great error was to approve of Hitler—at least briefly—because he seemed an expression of the collective unconscious. Thus Hitler had to be good.) In reality, the unconscious mind presents us with endless dualisms, and we become wise only to the extent to which we make contact with our best instincts rather than our worst ones.

**Lazy Lucifer:** In a later book, *People of the Lie*, Peck reveals what he thinks is really behind laziness. It is Satan, who, Peck insists, is not a metaphor but an actual spiritual being who intervenes in human affairs. (Peck had, since writing *The Road Less Traveled*, become a Christian evangelical.) According to Peck, Satan's method for disseminating evil is to use extraordinarily powerful people to twist, destroy or otherwise suppress the spiritual growth of those around them; their generic characteristic is an ability to conceal their real aims from others, and to some ex-



## Peck's self-help: the load unravelled

tent from themselves. Peck writes of two mental patients who he says were possessed by Satan, at whose exorcisms he was present. How does Peck know that Satan was there? He just knows; his presence was "alien and inhuman," as everybody there agreed.

A belief in Satan as a real spiritual being is completely foreign to the thinking of most modern intellectuals. But that is not important to Peck, because he is not a highbrow author, but a popular one, and the rules for popular writing are different. One purpose of highbrow culture is to repress difficult questions, or to imply that there are no answers to them. But the central purpose of this brand of popular culture is to raise difficult questions, and then supply easy answers.

Clearly Peck is addressing issues that many Americans find important. Why are his solutions so popular?

**Recipe for inspiration:** To begin with, a successful inspirational book must present familiar ideas in ways that seem new, exciting and authoritative. Peck's belief that laziness is an Original Sin caused by the Devil is a very old American idea, a modern restatement of the peculiar High Calvinism so typical of Puritan separatists in 17th-century America. (A favorite saying of those times was, "Idle hands are the Devil's workshop"—and this ideal of productivity as the highest good still plays an important part in the American worship of the marketplace.)

A successful inspirational book must also provide a pat answer, and Peck fills the bill here as well. ("With total discipline we can solve all problems," he writes.) The popular thinker must also appear to effortlessly synthesize diverse or opposing traditions. Peck's oversimplified schema integrates religion and psychotherapy. ("In my vi-

sion the collective unconscious is God; the conscious is man as individual; and the personal unconscious is the interface between them.")

In this kind of self-help literature one doesn't compare one's vision to existing or competing traditions, which in Peck's case would have to include most modern theologians; this strain of popular writing exists to inspire rather than persuade. Inspirational writers must wax anecdotal, regularly illustrating ideas with stories and jokes. This is the only way—as Lincoln well knew—that an applied philosophy can be popularly disseminated.

But Peck's appeal stems from more than his savvy adherence to a proven formula. Perhaps his strongest attraction is his willingness to acknowledge the reality of evil. We are surrounded by evidence of it—the Holocaust, the nuclear arms race—but perhaps the secular intellectual's greatest default has been an inability to develop a theory of evil and how it is culturally transmitted, or even to admit that it exists. This has left

**In six months M. Scott Peck's best-selling self-help book will influence more people to think about the nuclear arms race than the left could in six years.**

the door open to people like Peck, who at least are not afraid to address the issue.

The pity, of course, is that Peck does not take the next step, and acknowledge that evil comes from the same place as good: the human

personality. Peck's failure to take responsibility for evil by blaming it on the Devil is perhaps the ultimate intellectual laziness, which may or may not be a form of spiritual laziness as well.

Much of *The Different Drum*—Peck's most recent book—is simi-

### POP LIT

larly disfigured by a kind of new scholasticism, in which unseen and unprovable things are assumed to be real, and to possess powers beyond any observable effect. Most of the book has to do with Peck's search for "community," which—as always with him—boils down to a feeling. People meet in groups to discuss their feelings, and pass through certain stages, which culminate in community. But how is that feeling of community translated into a political program? For Peck the feeling is enough: "It is a personal experience so powerful that it can become the driving force behind the quest for peace on a global scale."

The belief that sensibilities can change the world without being expressed in a political form is an astonishing delusion. Yet despite this shortcoming, the last third of *The Different Drum* (titled with typical Peck modesty *The Solution*) contains a surprisingly penetrating analysis of the arms race. Peck identifies the arms race as the supreme modern evil, somewhat predictably comparing it to a game (*à la* Eric Berne's *Games People Play*). But Berne emphasized that there is always an unspoken payoff that players do not want others to see, and which they do not want to face.

Peck identifies this payoff, at least in the U.S., as being economic. "There is considerable reason to believe that we are dependent upon the arms race to maintain our economic stability and our generally high standard of living—that, in fact, the military-industrial complex of this country behaves in such a way as *actually* to support the arms race in order to maintain the economy." Peck points out that another aspect of this game is to keep all such insights out of the major media.

Here is where Peck's original theory of *The Road Less Traveled* becomes a useful social metaphor. In order to avoid the pain of economic depression, American society represses the truth about what it is doing, and ends up with the insanity of nuclear aggression. To avoid short-run pain, it ends up with long-run death.

Peck advocates making over our military establishment into a national service corps, retaining a special "cadre of brave men and women thoroughly trained in the techniques of passive resistance and non-violent action." Economic conversion is absolutely necessary,

and even then there will be "some disruption, some pain." At this point Peck starts getting really radical. "In the minds of many, capitalism, as we currently practice it, is all tied up with 'Americanism' in a prideful bundle of self-satisfaction. Critics who argue for significant change are not welcomed. 'Capitalism, Love It or Leave It,' could be a subtranslation of 'America, Love It or Leave It.'"

Peck softens these ideas somewhat by making it clear that he wants to transform rather than replace American capitalism (by bringing business people into "genuine community"). But he is adamant that the "central problem of capitalism is that it is, in and of itself, amoral." To be transformed, it must submit to a good higher than economic self-interest. "It is unabashedly self-centered. And a will unsubmitted to anything higher than itself is, or will inevitably become, evil. So it is that capitalism, in and of itself, has a profound tendency to 'refuse progress.'"

Any popular writer who publishes ideas like these will eventually feel some heat, so it will be interesting to see what form the inevitable attacks take. At present, Peck is still the nation's most popular speaker, and he shows no willingness yet to back down on his insistence that opposition to the arms race is central to religious commitment. This means that in six months he will influence more people to think about the arms race than the left could in six years. Furthermore, his concept of small groups meeting to discuss issues of community is not unlike the *comunidad de base* (base community) developed by Liberation Theology in Latin America, and is an approach currently being explored by many on the religious left in North America. For these reasons alone Peck is not part of the problem.

But neither is he part of the solution. Community alone is not enough to change things—at some point members of the group must become politically active, either as a group or as individuals. Peck is right when he writes of an underlying sense of evil in American life. But neither the expiatory devices of the evangelicals nor the feeling of being close to others in a spiritual community are enough to address this evil. The key redemptive act is a commitment to social change; and that can happen only when the desire for community is translated into political language. In the future perhaps that translation will become the job of the more sophisticated elements of the religious left. ■

**Lawrence Swaim** is a novelist who is helping to organize a left-caucus in the Unitarian Universalist denomination.



**Walker**

Directed by Alex Cox

By Pat Aufderheide

**N**ICARAGUA HAS BEEN AN EXERCISE ground for imperial arrogance—in the last two centuries, British and U.S.—for so long that the petty invasion of filmmaker Alex Cox and crew to make *Walker* there is a mere blip on the landscape. But it is too bad that the movie, made to tap the outrageous history of imperial intervention in Central America, shares the cultural isolationism and bluster that has characterized so many political forays.

There were great hopes for *Walker*, not only by Sandinista partisans and U.S. foreign policy critics, but by film enthusiasts drawn to the hectic energy of Cox's earlier work in *Repo Man* and *Sid and Nancy*. Cox, an English filmmaker now based in Los Angeles, can be a punk poet of celluloid—his theme: anger and desire among the ruins of expectation.

He's been a voice of a youth culture abandoned to itself and struggling for breath in a Thatcher-Reagan atmosphere. His style is ragged, violent, explosive and also mournfully affectionate to the bleakly rebellious. He's been a special gift to character actors and to filmgoers who resist the machine-perfect in prepared entertainment. If his films have carried social commentary, it's not because of any political message but because of the angry, oppositional energy—both battling and expressing alienation—that Cox brings to a project.

**Weirder than fiction:** William Walker's story attracted Cox. Walker was a mercenary who, encouraged by magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt to make the place safe for Vanderbilt's Central American canal plans, conquered Nicaragua in 1855 and installed himself briefly as president. Partly, it was Cox's impudent desire to make a cinematic statement against what he described to a reporter as a "covertly fascist" U.S.; his hackles were raised in 1984 when he visited El Salvador at a time of elections in both countries. And partly it was the thrill of a true story that was weirder than fiction, populated by obsessives, renegades and madmen.

Thanks to cooperation from the Nicaraguan state film institute and the convenience of Third World wage scales, Cox filmed his deliberately tawdry but lavishly mounted epic in war-torn Nicaragua. Ed Harris as Walker is the center of a film that hugs close to the ragtag group Walker brought with him and who were dubbed at the time, by an ever-hype-happy American media, "The Immortals."

Cox's expressed goal kept jour-



*Walker*: A clumsy, ineffective anti-imperialist tract.

## Alex Cox's *Walker* on the wild side

nalists trekking down to Nicaragua to write a seemingly endless series of location stories on the filming. He wanted, one gathers from his assembled remarks, to make an ironic extravaganza that would simultaneously mock cinematic pretension and political arrogance. Invoking such names as

### FILM

Peckinpah, Buñuel and Kurosawa, throwing around references to soap opera, spaghetti westerns and horror films, he claimed to be making a film that stylistically as well as thematically would rail against the banality of imperialism.

He got Rudy Wurlitzer (*Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*) to write the screenplay, and Wurlitzer freely talked about the need to liberate the tale from political sermonizing, to make sure that, with black humor, self-ridiculing exaggeration and horror, the film would conquer pietistic tendencies in the all-too-timely subject matter. Cox pulled into the project a constellation of celebrated names, including Marlee Matlin to play the role of Walker's fiancée and Clash musician Joe Strummer to do the music (hands down, the best part of the film).

**Dust and death:** But *Walker* ends up a mere chronicle of excess, without ironic distance. Most of the film takes place in a swirl of dust, skirmishes punctuated by rivulets of movie-movie blood and the occasional spectacular street fire. In-

terludes of speechifying, dining and parlor and bedroom games occur at the leaden pace of provincial opera.

So much of the film is quite simply about mounting a military scene with plenty of extras and explosions that your attention gets drawn to the monumental work of production design (you begin to think about the work of smudging all that clothing into the proper degree of sordidness). You never get drawn into the madness that Harris so diligently tries to register with his intensely controlled performance. Somehow—and perhaps this happened in the editing—whatever surrealistic, magical-realist or postmodern-feisty black humor was promised in the filming has been cut straight out.

Cox seems to believe that the explanation for imperialist adventurism lies in individual psychopathy. Cornelius Vanderbilt (played by Peter Boyle, who is filmed in such fierce closeup that any acting wit he could have brought to the role is wasted) is a megalomaniac madman who recognizes a kindred spirit in the charismatic mercenary Walker. Walker is a visionary so full of his own messianism that he never seems to need to share his vision with his own troops—who die for him anyway.

**Crazy like a fox:** But no tradition so long as imperial intervention survives on the basis of derangement alone. You may need a few madmen to stand in the front lines, but madness alone is a frail reed

on which to rest historical process. Vanderbilt, if he was crazy, was crazy like a fox, and also working in a long and continuing tradition that conveniently links corporate with political adventurism. Vanderbilt's plans fell through, but the English firm of Brown Brothers picked up where he left off, followed by American interests and Marines. Walker's followers are legion, but only a few are as blissed-out on the righteousness of power as Ollie North.

It's not just that Cox treats interventionism as a personal pathology, as if magnates and presidents were all lunatics, accidentally positioned over the huddling bodies of those helpless victims of history, the masses. Let's not forget that Walker got U.S. presidential backing as well as public adoration, and that he, like every foreign invader so far, eventually lost in Nicaragua.

The problem is that such a portrayal simply makes ordinary narrative impossible. You never believe the action, and you're never entranced enough by fantastic excess to forgive the filmmaker for robbing you of the delicious empathy that the wide screen in the dark promises. Like Walker's men, you're just plowing inexorably through dust to death. **White men's burdens:** And the deaths are all those of The Immortals. There are Nicaraguan bodies (and, although you have to parse the movie to figure it out, other Central Americans, who did unite to expel Walker), but they are more on the order of scenery. A climactic gory scene at the end composes dead

Nicaraguan troops on the steps of the cathedral in a scene intended—once again in a clumsy attempt at historical elision and random indictment of conscienceless power—to evoke the massacre of Salvadorans during the funeral of Archbishop Romero. There are a couple of opportunistic and vacillating Nicaraguan liberal politicians, as well as an overheated Nicaraguan Mata Hari (played engagingly by Mexican actress Blanca Guerra), none of whom is the least illuminate why Walker and The Immortals would have encountered any mass resistance to their conquest.

In the end, the Nicaraguans are statistics, whether they're those anonymous guys in white, looking rather like Mexican revolutionaries, or bodies littering the road. They're the dust in the atmosphere, the confusion brought to the mad manifest destiny vision of Walker. The blood, and what tragedy there is, belongs to The Immortals. And they've never become interesting enough for us to immerse ourselves in their pathetic suicide.

The vacuity at the center of *Walker* renders Cox's cinematic game-playing coyly artificial. Cox uses anachronism with a heavy hand, pushing the viewer's nose in parallels between Walker then and contrasts now. The film is dotted with modern appliances and plastic; dialogue is punctuated with modern vulgarity; media adoration for the international adventurer then and now is underlined by seeing Walker on the cover of both *Time* and *Newsweek*; and the film resolves with the arrival of a U.S. helicopter carrying a U.S. State Department representative.

The anachronisms don't even shock, possibly because the film locates its characters within their madness, not within their societal epoch. The melodramatic parlor scenes, the spaghetti-western gore, the occasional lapse into silent-movie jerkiness, register not as a crash through the barriers of convention and complacency but as the gestures of a smart-alec filmmaker, a rebel in search of a cause.

The irony of *Walker* is that a film made by someone so preternaturally on top of angry youthful resistance to pseudo-rational pragmatism should end up such a silly, simplistic and, above all, moralistic message movie. Willy-nilly, *Walker* ends up being the flip side of *Latino's* counterfeit coin. If *Latino* flopped for its preachy earnestness, its patronizing and melodramatic portrayal of both North and Central Americans, *Walker* never really challenges that vision. It merely offers spiteful, adolescent backtalk to the clichés that govern interventionist complacency. It ends up a clumsy—and worse, ineffective—anti-imperialist tract rather than a plunge into the heart of darkness.

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Chilean women make a traditional applique art into an intriguing political weapon.

## Chilean women excel at the applied arts

### Scraps of Life: Chilean Arpilleras

By Marjorie Agosin  
Translated by Cola Franzen  
The Red Sea Press, 166 pp., \$9.95

By Darcy DeMarco

#### "Questions"

Where is the son that I love so much?  
Where is the warmth of his white hands?

When I call, only silence responds.  
Iron chains have left him prisoner  
and if you search blindly for your star in the night  
you will find only shadows, sadness  
and reproaches.

What guard guards the bars of the dark cell that hides you?  
they have left me a wound that is uncertainty

and I shout your name that the wind carries away  
my throat is raw from calling you.

—from "Testimony #11," a poem written by a Chilean woman whose son has disappeared, which appears in Marjorie Agosin's *Scraps of Life: Chilean Arpilleras*

**T**HROUGHOUT SANTIAGO, THE wound of uncertainty continues to bleed for the women of the Association of the Families of the Detained-Disappeared. Over a decade of silence has worn away any initial hope of seeing husbands, sons and brothers alive; years of poverty and hardship have aged the women.

But against the silence and the poverty these women have found an effective weapon—a weapon fashioned with a needle out of bits

of leftover cloth and burlap sacks. And in the creation of this weapon, the mothers and sisters of Chile have found within themselves a strength they did not know they possessed; an understanding that only long suffering can bring. Forced out of their traditional lives by the destruction of their families, these women have discovered a voice long denied them. And they will not be silenced.

**Applied politics:** *Scraps of Life: Chilean Arpilleras*, by Marjorie Agosin, tells the story of the *arpilleristas*, the women who have transformed a traditional form of art into a powerful political statement. The *arpillera* is an applique tapestry that in more secure times portrayed quiet pastoral scenes.

But the *arpilleras* of Santiago, born of poverty and violence, tell different tales: armed soldiers, dressed in black, seize the men of a neighborhood as children flee; a group of pilgrims stops at Lonquén, site of a mass grave; women and children surround a huge pot at a soup kitchen. Many *arpilleras* bear slogans: "Truth and justice for the detained disappeared"; "No more torture," and the photo of a vanished loved one. Scenes of life and death, often side by side, all set against the Andes mountains beneath a bright sun. This is not the art of passivity.

Though initially regarded by the women as a way to make money, the *arpilleras* evolved into a potent means of expression. As they continued to sew and gained self-confidence, many of the women began to look at themselves and their sur-

roundings in a new way. "I walked around like an idiot," one woman tells Agosin. "I looked closely at everything. I believe I learned how to see." They also enlarged their perception of their role.

"The *arpilleristas*—housewives, seamstresses, laundresses—assumed a new identity that added an important dimension to their traditional female role," Agosin writes. "Now they were no longer totally tied to domestic chores in their own homes."

As the women became friendly, those who could read began bringing in newspapers to the workshops and reading them aloud, exposing many of the women for the first time to life outside their domestic sphere.

**Stronger slogans:** And as political consciousness grows, the messages on the *arpilleras* become more powerful. "We are here to denounce what happened to us and to put our anguish into the *arpil-*

## PROTEST

*leras* so others will know," one woman says. "I have made my *arpilleras* because I have a double crime to denounce, the kidnapping of both my son and my brother," states another. In a land where 10,000 have disappeared since 1973, the potential for this pictorial denunciation is virtually unlimited.

Though *arpilleras* are forbidden art in Chile, the workshops have grown from just a few women in 1974 to more than 30 with more than 800 participants. They are afforded protection by the Vicariate of Solidarity, a human rights body of the Catholic Church that provides them with materials and then sells the completed *arpilleras* outside Chile.

Although women from all classes attend the workshops, Agosin says most of them are poor and many are illiterate. "Many of them work as maids during the day," she says, "and then sew early in the morning

(the shantytowns often lack electricity) or late at night." Such hardship does not deter the women. In *Scraps of Life*, Agosin writes, "The movement of the *arpilleristas*, still in its infancy and still to be fully realized even though it has been in existence for more than 14 years, is nevertheless the first autonomous movement in Chile organized by working-class women."

In creating the tapestries, these women have found not only an outlet for their grief, but new depths and possibilities within themselves. *Scraps of Life* details the recent history of women in Chile, and documents how the right was able to manipulate women to bring about Allende's downfall. Agosin provides a sense of Chilean women's lives and how they have been upended by the destruction of their families.

She also makes it clear that despite the abuse these courageous women suffer for daring to speak out—the women of the Association are the only continuous visible opposition to Pinochet—working-class women have made an important jump forward and will not readily go back into the house and keep quiet. As one woman told Agosin, "Women have changed so much that the military themselves made the comment that the biggest mistake they made was in leaving the family members of the disappeared alive."

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## Working overtime to highlight the overlooked

### Sisterhood & Solidarity: Feminism and Labor in Modern Times

By Diane Balser  
South End Press, 246 pp., \$9.00

By Ellen Cassedy

**F**IFTEEN YEARS AGO I GRADUATED with a B.A. in American history, and right away I landed a \$2.50-an-hour job as a clerk-typist.

One morning, much to my surprise, I overheard two veteran secretaries—both highly conservative, so I thought—deep in a discussion of whether their boss was a male chauvinist pig. (I believe they decided he was.)

The women in the cubicles near mine hadn't shown up for any feminist marches, they hadn't read any feminist bibles, and more than one took care to let me know that she was "not women's lib." (You might support peace or civil rights, but women's lib you were—or were not.)

But there was no doubt that while my consciousness was being

raised by campus women's groups, women in the office had also been profoundly influenced by feminist ideas.

At that time neither the leaders of the women's movement nor those of the labor movement seemed to know that women like these existed—much less how to get them involved. But within the next several years all that changed.

**Feminism gets to work:** 9to5, the national association of working women of which I was a founder, started up in Boston in 1972. The Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) was founded in 1974. Women's committees proliferated within individual unions, and everywhere women pushed their way into non-traditional jobs. All of these efforts created a working women's feminism and helped bring women into the mainstream of the labor movement.

Some women joined in because sexism on the job was driving them crazy. Others thought of themselves as underpaid workers first, as women second. But the two con-

cerns—for women's rights and for workers' rights—seemed to fuse naturally. The 9to5 "Bill of Rights for Women Office Workers," for example, called for fair pay—and it called for equal pay. It affirmed "the right to respect as women and as workers."

In *Sisterhood and Solidarity: Feminism and Labor in Modern Times*, Diane Balser, a longtime feminist activist, explores the mobilizing of women "as women and as workers" in three organizations: the Working Women's Association (a creation of suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony), Union WAGE (a now-defunct San Francisco Bay Area group of the '70s) and CLUW (still thriving). More such collaboration between feminists and unions, she asserts, would benefit the women's movement, the labor movement and all women.

Unfortunately, two of the three case studies intended to illustrate this point are poorly chosen.

**Stumbling and bumbling:** The Working Women's Association stumbled from one embarrassing mistake to another before folding after 15 months. At its peak it involved 100 women workers.

Union WAGE was founded in 1971 by long-time union activists