

The following is an edited version of a speech given by James Petras at the Conference on Rethinking Marxism held December 2 at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

By James Petras

TWO RECENT EVENTS DRAMATICALLY illustrate the contradictions of contemporary political reality. One involves Lech Walesa begging the U.S. Congress for loans and investment, offering up for sale Polish industries, resources and labor. The mass media and politicians celebrated this plea as marking the "end of socialism," noting that the working class of the East had pronounced itself as a partisan of free enterprise—the only road toward progress, growth and democracy.

As Walesa addressed Congress, the people of El Salvador were engaged in a national insurrection: workers and peasants—unwilling to submit to a regime of free enterprise and machine guns—fought in a life-and-death struggle against the U.S.-financed death squads and generals. The massive uprising clearly underlines the failure of capitalism to deal with the fundamental social needs of the vast majority of Central American people.

The crises left by Stalinism in the East are matched by the failure of free enterprise in the South. The major difference is that while a peaceful transition has proven possible in the former Soviet sphere, such transition in the South is blocked by West-

The political contradictions of progress and democracy

ern-backed terrorist regimes. The mass media's selective presentation of one face of reality—its exclusive focus on the crisis of communism—obscures the duality of crisis in the contemporary world.

Contradictions of the anti-Stalinist movements: The anti-Stalinist movements are made up of contradictory social classes, conflicting ideologies and incompatible social priorities. These movements possess an ambiguity frequently glossed over in the West. The ambiguity flows from the term "freedom," with which all of the movements define themselves. While the movements themselves are clear in what they want to be free from, there is no clarity in what they want to be free for—what kind of social order, political authority or economic system they desire.

Thus the movements in the East represent both historical opportunity and danger. Insofar as the anti-communist outpouring unlocked civil society, repoliticized the populace and organized autonomous movements, it has undermined the police-state structures that prevented the emergence of democracy. There is, however, no automatic connection between the demise of police states and the emergence of democracy, socialist or liberal. Post-Stalinist

societies are now up for grabs. Initially, in fact, new forms of domination are emerging. Chauvinist ethnic majorities lord over minorities, and a new political class of technocrats, upwardly mobile intellectuals, freebooter capitalists and *compradores* facilitate the selling-off of national patrimony (a la Walesa).

But the direct result of integration of Eastern Europe into the West and the introduction of free-market economic policies will almost inevitably provoke a "second wave" of class conflict. In this sense, the Western celebration of the restoration of "market democracies" could be premature: inequality, unemployment, declining living standards and diminution of social and workplace rights that emerge with free-market restoration will provoke resistance. The naive expectations of free-market ideologues and technocrats that "integration" into Western Europe will result in high growth rates and modernization overlook the disastrous experiences in neighboring Yugoslavia, a pioneer in market socialism that has four-digit inflation, a currency that has declined 50-fold in three years and an unpayable debt.

The prospects for a peaceful transition from bureaucratic collectivism to bourgeois electoral regimes are poor. Liberal democrats and market economists lack strong traditions or institutional bases in most of Eastern Europe. Given the historical strength of nationalist and populist forces it is likely that the political process will move quickly beyond liberal democracy with free markets. Post-liberal politics may just as likely result in the emergence of authoritarian clerical nationalism or even a neo-Stalinist revivalism.

What is clear is that new market policies in the East combine the worst vices of state monopolies and Western unregulated prices, unemployment and job insecurity. Eastern ideologues have consumed the free-market ideology of Western capitalism, not the state regulated and directed capitalist practices of Western Europe and Japan. In this sense they follow in the footsteps of the Latin American elites and are likely to suffer the same consequences. Contrary to the wishes of the Eastern free-market advocates and Western publicists, we are likely to see the Latin-Americanization of Eastern Europe—a region that may be hegemonized and plundered by the West through a class of privileged national political intermediaries who organize a docile cheap-labor market and sell off national resources. In such an explosive context, round two of the popular struggle may resurface and a revitalized working-class socialist movement re-emerge.

Decline of liberal-electoral market regimes in Latin America: The most common term used to describe the '80s is the "lost decade." Under the aegis of free-market economic practices and deep structural integration into the financial and investment circuits of Western capitalism, Latin America has experienced its worst crises of the 20th century: incomes have

plummeted to the levels of the early '60s and continue to fall; malnutrition has become endemic; and inflation rates have reached four digits.

Economic stagnation has become the norm as the open economies have allowed for the ascendancy of speculative capital, ecological pillage and massive capital flight. Out of this matrix of real existing free enterprises, massive social movements have emerged that challenge the power of the market and its practitioners. Unlike the peaceful exit of communist regimes under the benign eye of the Soviets, the liberal electoral regimes—conservative and social democratic—have resorted to mass violence and state terror to sustain their market economies and to uphold their neoclassical dogma. Alan Garcia, the social democratic president in Peru, has presided over the most repressive period in recent Peruvian history with more than 16,000 people killed. Carlos Andres Perez, the Venezuelan social democratic president, has violently suppressed citizens protesting his orthodox austerity measures, leaving more than 1,500 people dead in Caracas and elsewhere. In Central America, Christian Democrats and conservative electoral regimes have taken turns with the military in the wholesale slaughter of opponents of free-market economic policies.

Throughout Latin America there is massive opposition to the "elite-export" economic model and its Western backers. Accompanying this opposition is widespread disaffection with the ruling liberal electoral regimes. Movements against Western-style free enterprise are on the ascendancy everywhere.

In Mexico, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas won last year's presidential election (with an estimated 55 percent of the vote in Mexico City alone) only to have it stolen by the pro-U.S. Salinas-PRI mafia. In Brazil the Workers Party, supported by trade unions and neighborhood organizations, has, in its programmatic challenge to the Western bankers and their local counterparts, become the chosen party of tens of millions of Brazilian voters. In Uruguay, the Socialist Broad Front has won the mayoralty of Montevideo, an historical first. In Peru the electoral and guerrilla left are a growing force among millions of discontented Peruvian peasants and urban poor, battered by the operations of the free market. In Central America the pro-free enterprise contras have been decisively defeated, and mass movements in El Salvador and, to a lesser extent, in Guatemala have demonstrated a tremendous resiliency in reconstructing popular power in the face of genocidal repression.

Increasingly, the pro-Western free-market policies of electoral regimes have led to a deeper political polarization. The liberal-social democrats' right turn in economic policy and the militarization of political life have led to the disintegration of the political center. The early euphoria that accompanied the emergence of liberal democracy has given way to profound antagonism in which bankers and exporters linked to the West are increasingly looking to impose authoritarian solutions—a kind of neo-Stalinist capitalism in which opening markets is accompanied by expanding prisons. On the other side, the socio-political

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Rally at White House
Nonviolent Civil Disobedience
After Rally

■ **End all U.S. aid to El Salvador**
Withdraw all U.S. advisors;
Stop Repressing the People: Respect human rights.
Support a negotiated political solution

■ **End the U.S. war against Nicaragua**
Respect Nicaragua's election; End the contra war
Lift the trade embargo and normalize relations

■ **Cut military spending; Fund human needs**

■ **No Invasions**
End the occupation of Panama;
U.S. troops and bases out of Central America;
End military aid to Guatemala

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VIEWPOINT

movements are moving beyond liberalism and the failures of capitalism in search of alternative popular based and nationally controlled socio-economic systems.

While state Stalinism declines in the East, a version of free enterprise Stalinism has emerged in the West as liberal market economies collapse under the weight of pillage, debt and capital flight. The collapse of the liberal-market regime, however, brings in its wake several historical alternatives—the emergence of death-squad democracies, democratic socialism, or further disintegration. The refusal of the West, and particularly of the U.S., to disengage from the South has made the process of transition extremely costly.

East-West detente; North-South conflict: As the Soviet empire disintegrates, the U.S. intensifies its efforts to retain control over its client states and to expand its influence in contested areas. The key to understanding the new detente is non-reciprocity in which Washington defines Soviet "reforms" in terms of cooperation in facilitating recovery of U.S. hegemony.

The Soviets have accepted the transformation of Poland from a communist-dominated regime beholden to the Kremlin to a parliamentary capitalist regime intent on establishing deep structural ties with the West. In this process, Moscow did not intervene in Poland's electoral process or organize or advocate armed intervention to undermine its transition to capitalism. In contrast, the U.S. has financed a decade-long military effort to restore its political clients in Nicaragua—it has organized an economic embargo, mined the harbors and authored a text on the assassination of political opponents. As the electoral process unfolds, Washington has allocated \$8 million to subsidize client groups there.

The contrasting response in Soviet-Polish and U.S.-Nicaraguan relations are emblematic of a global pattern. While hundreds of thousands of Czechs and East Germans launched peaceful revolutions, in one day six Jesuits were killed in El Salvador, subsequent to the murder of 10 trade union leaders. While communist powers withdraw from Cambodia, Washington and its allies continue or increase their support to the Pol Pot-led opposition. While the Soviets decrease their military support for Syria and urge Palestinian acceptance of Israel, the U.S. does nothing to prevent Israeli violence against unarmed protesters against its annexation policies.

Similar patterns can be seen in Africa. Soviet concessions in southern Africa are not reciprocated—rather, the West interprets Soviet withdrawal as weakness and as an opportunity to push harder to establish Western hegemony. Soviet-U.S. detente may lessen tensions in the North while increasing them in the South, prolonging struggles by strengthening the forces of violence and exacerbating the conditions of exploitation. Today, peace is tested in human rights and social struggles in Managua, San Salvador, Luanda and Phnomh Penh—not in Warsaw, Budapest and Berlin.

Real disarmament would begin with large-scale cutbacks in conventional arms to Western clients who have murdered 100,000 Indians and peasants in Guatemala, hundreds of thousands of Angolans and Mozambicans, and 50,000 Nicaraguans. In

the Third World, American-style free enterprise has been rejected by the vast majority: it should not be allowed to keep shooting its way to power.

Inter-imperial rivalries and the decline of the U.S.: Profound crises confront capitalism in the South, but emerging and deepening divisions among the major capitalist countries threaten more immediately to disrupt the system. While the role of the state has declined in the U.S., multinational corporations have expanded. This disjuncture between the power of the state and capital means, in effect, that all the costs of reproduction and defense of capital are borne by the state (and by the working taxpayers), while profits, interests and rents are accrued internationally. Concomitantly, the ascendancy of fictitious capital and the decline of industrial capital has led to the decimation of the industrial working class, which, in turn, has destabilized the family and created the basis for the massive drug economy and the routinization of crime. In this sense, crime and drugs are class questions rooted in the profound and far-reaching consequences of the transition from industrial to fictitious capital. Unless the issues of the ascendancy of fictitious capital and the fragmentation of the working class are tackled, all the anti-drug campaigns and civilian patrols in the world will not prevent the production and reproduction of the drug economy.

Intellectual fashions notwithstanding, the primary reality of politics in the West has been the centrality of the class struggle—class war from the top. Massive transfers of wealth, through wage constraints, have intensified production. And the lowering of social payments has been accompanied by the wholesale pillaging of the state through tax subsidies, bank bailouts and corrupt contracting. Today more than ever, class predominates in defining politics. The centrality of class rule over the state is transparent in the intervention and defeat of one major union struggle after another—air controllers, machinists, miners. Business unionism and class collaboration—tri-partite cooperation among business, state and labor has been replaced by bi-partite action to eliminate unions or subordinate them to the needs of international capitalist competition.

The state's frontal attack on labor and the process of subordinating labor to international capitalist competition has undermined the myth about the autonomy of the state. The daily workings of real existing capitalist states have forced all the contemporary social movements—women's movements, black community movements, environmental movements—to confront the central issue of the economy and the capitalist class that controls it and shapes our social priorities. More specifically, the ascendancy of fictitious capital provides few opportunities for black employment, has no use for health and day-care allocations and sees the environment merely as another commodity to strip and sell. Insofar as these social movements move toward confronting the root source of oppression and degradation, they must confront the class character of the state and the organization of economic power.

Political struggle in the 1990s: Just as the massive uprising of the Salvadoran

popular guerrilla movement buried the pretensions of those who announced the triumph of capitalism in El Salvador, so the dense network of grass-roots organizations that permeate civil society in the U.S. attest to the vitality of the popular struggle against the supremacy of the state. The strengths and weaknesses of U.S. politics are evidenced in this dual reality: nowhere in the Western world is there such an extensive network of organizational activity directed toward defending individual and collective interests from the depredations and neglect of the capitalist state as in the U.S. And, at the same time, nowhere in the Western world is there such a thorough absence of political representation of working-class or popular interests in the national structures of political power—in the executive branch, Congress or political parties. There is a profound disjuncture between the democratic movements in civil society and the closed, monolithic political structures that monopolize national political life. Political struggle in the '90s must move from the realm of civil society to political action, from local grass-roots pressure groups to independent political alternatives, from a one-party to a multiparty system and from a monolithic media to pluralism.

The key point of departure for consequential political change must be a break with the two factions of the one-party system. From Truman in Korea to Kennedy and Johnson in Vietnam to Carter in Central America, the Democratic Party has been the centerpiece of war in the Third World. While big city Democrats talk to the left, they work for and are financed by the real estate developers and financial interests, as a quick glance at the campaign financing of the Democratic mayors in the recent elections attests. Reagan's budget cuts alone did not create the low-paid service sector of the working class or the homeless. The big-city Democrats, black and white, played a major role: the alliance between the Democrats and speculator capitalism in Detroit, Atlanta, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles and Boston led to the massive urban displacement of low-income housing, industrial manufacturing and the expansion of downtown office buildings, high-rent condos and the exploitation of low-income "illegal labor" in the service sector.

The reemergence of substantial opposition in the U.S.—as has been true since the '30s—occurs through extra-electoral mobilization. Industrial unionism came about because of the CIO and the massive wave of

direct action in the factories and streets. Civil rights and urban reforms came about because of massive black street protests and urban uprisings. The Vietnam War ended because of massive disruption of troop trains and state business. More recently, the rush to reverse women's rights was set back on its heels by the massive march of women in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. It is clear that there is a powerful and effective reservoir and tradition of political action embedded in civil society which has emerged time and again in moments of crisis and is doing so again.

But with all of its strength, mass direct action is single-issue pressure politics and does not transform the institutions that perpetuate the problems. When the movements ebb, as they must with time, the politicians and institutions begin to revert back to serving the masters of property and wealth, now chipping away at the reforms (liberals), now salvaging whole programs (conservatives). In a word, pressure politics doesn't build structures that can sustain and deepen the changes fought for and initiated by sacrifices and struggles. Movement politics are like Sisyphus pushing the stone of reform up the hill and having it fall back as it approaches the crest. To go over the top, a new political movement—one that learns from the positive side of the Eastern European experience, one that rejects compromises with the current corrupt one-party system (including its liberal face), that pressures relentlessly for access to the mass media and seeks to break the political monopoly of real estate and financial capital—must be built.

A new left political movement must embrace the environmental and women's movements, place the black and white working class at the core of its politics and focus its energies on common adversaries—the capitalist class that controls the means of pollution, the sources of employment discrimination and unemployment, and the means of propaganda. We, too, can take courage from the movements in Central America who have said "Enough!" and who are prepared to carry the struggle to its ultimate consequences. Let us draw on the best traditions and practices of the anti-capitalism of the South and the anti-Stalinism of the East and build a truly democratic society rooted in our own traditions and anchored in the strength of civil society.

James Petras is a sociology professor at SUNY-Binghamton, N.Y.

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"The most dangerous woman in America" is how detractors described legendary labor organizer Mary Harris Jones, known as Mother Jones. It all depends which side you're on, of course. Feminist writer Meridel LeSueur remembers Mother Jones' power of love and fierce determination. This account is drawn from LeSueur's preface to the new edition of The Autobiography of Mother Jones, published by Charles H. Kerr.

By Meridel LeSueur

I SAW MOTHER JONES WHEN I WAS 14 years old. I marched with her, after the Ludlow Massacre, down the streets of Fort Scott, Kan., where she had come with the miners whose wives and children had been shot down by John D. Rockefeller during the Colorado strike of 1914.

It was a time before the first world war when exploitation of workers was worldwide as capitalism moved to consolidate its power against the world movement of workers who cried out for socialism. Miners worked 16 hours underground in

ORGANIZING

hazardous conditions. John L. Lewis said the number of miners killed in the mines would circle the earth twice, two abreast.

The faculty of the People's College, a worker's education college, marched. I held my mother's hand and marched beside her among the miners whose families had been killed. There was no band. This little woman, Mother Jones, marched in the front line with her "boys." They were going across America to tell about the massacre and to raise money for the survivors of the broken strike.

It was a solemn tread as they marched, their bodies bent as if the Earth still rested on them. They were gaunt Armenians and Greeks. My mother was weeping. People stood on the walks along the line of march, some weeping, and some ran out to grasp their hands and some stood meanly or looked down from windows.

I wept too, seeing bodies bearing the mark of their oppression, of their stolen labor, mourning their holy dead.

I knew then I saw a woman of the future, a kind of being I wanted to be like. She was small but powerful, walking boldly in her black shoes, dressed like my grandma, a black full skirt and black shirtwaist, with a white fissa around her Irish face, and on her graying hair a little black hat like my grandma always wore. Women wore hats like St. Peter told them to. Even Mother Jones!

I had heard how the miners smuggled her by train into Trinidad, Colo., early in the strike. I had heard how the Rockefeller militia had arrested the tiny woman for supporting the workers' struggle. I had heard how

Mother Jones and the global family



Meridel LeSueur remembers Mother Jones (right): "I saw a woman of the future."

these thugs on the payroll of Colorado Fuel and Iron attacked the strikers' unarmed wives and children with machine guns and bombs—and how they horribly, brutally murdered the miners' leader, Louis Tikas. And I knew that Mother Jones was barnstorming the country speaking boldly against the Goliath for her fallen comrades.

The only fighter I had seen like her was Eugene Debs, and I felt they were leaders of the future because they were the first people I had seen with love. They were of, and came from, the wounds of the people, not as saviors from above or outside but with speech and images of the American workers and farmers. They were the first so-called organizers I saw who embraced you. With their bodies they were alive to all the wounded and knew the wick that was to be ignited. I saw then I wanted to be part of a witness for my people.

I'll never forget that evening in the workers' hall. We sang together "Solidarity Forever" and later danced and embraced the fathers of the dead children.

Mother Jones spoke. I had never heard a woman speak like that, without ego or superiority of thought or education. She used the language we all used, and I always felt the workers and farmers in the Midwest were the great poets, their language and cadence drawn from the prairie work and relationship.

She summoned the images of our

life and silence and struggle and invoked the muscular and impassioned fight and love for each other. We came alive as if touched by her mother flame. She seemed to nourish us, expel our fears, make fun of our so-called losing the strike. "You never lose a strike," she said. "You frighten the robbers and arm yourselves and your brothers." She scolded them like a mother for their timidity and fear and praised the farmers who had grabbed their squirrel guns to march to Trinidad. She made us a family endangered but powerful.

I never lost that image of that struggle. I felt engendered by the true mother, not the private mother of one family but the emboldened and blazing defender of all her sons and daughters, the true warriors and only defenders. I saw a woman not needing feminine guilt or feeling frightened or embarrassed or belittled.

My mother was a feminist. There were many socialist feminist leaders and theoreticians who told us what was true and what to do. But here was a bold, skilled, eloquent, unafraid woman, no apologist, nor wanting male powers. I saw that she and Debs were American leaders of a truly democratic future and teachers of the true American history, the history of free holders of the land and of brave workers like the Chicago anarchists of the 1880s who had been hanged for fighting

for the eight-hour day. Like Debs, Mother Jones invoked the memories of the workers not taught in schools or lecture halls.

They did not only teach, preach and point out. They loved the land, the struggle and the workers; farmers and miners were to them the light of the world, the carriers of all true knowledge. We were the hope of the future, comrades of the coming new day. She made you feel the true motherhood of the Earth and struggle. "You are the ones," she said, "who can say the word 'solidarity.' And call each other comrades. The oppressor can claim nothing but his greed."

I not only remember what she said that day and her indomitable body like a lighted wick from which we all took light; I also remember that she embraced us and called us by name. As a matter of fact, she and Debs were the only ones I remember who taught us the true embrace of the endangered comrade, the fighter by our side, the only illumination in the dark criminal death of capitalism.

Embracing was not common among the puritan socialists. My father was not for men embracing men or women.

It was a tradition that, when Debs spoke, four little girls in white were to go to the platform and give him one red rose. I looked forward to this, and the tall prophetic Debs would lean down to us and embrace

us and kiss us. It was truly an embrace, truly a gesture of love, as if he fathered you as no father did.

Everyone hearing Mother Jones that day felt her loving expression of strength, love and beauty of the working class.

I have met people who remember what Debs said, and Mother Jones' love. She gave them the word, the image, embrace, out of their own wounds.

We saw you need not cringe before the formidable enemy. She was not what is called womannish, waiting for praise. She also had no class fear. She appeared before the potentates—the despoilers, as she called them, the predators—like an angry mother, admonishing them to be human, if they could, to admit the union, to let the workers live.

The radical movement was not without its male chauvinists. Radical women were often put in menial jobs, belittled. She spoke up to the bureaucrats, the kings of labor, the stool pigeons, the hoarders like the Rockefellers, who claimed they did not know how the workers lived, and shamed them into making huge grants and starting libraries to hide their greed and guilt.

I must also say how she spoke to the working woman, who was doubly exploited. You did not see many organizers in the kitchen or caring for the children. In her being and in her speeches Mother Jones roused the spirit of the working-class women, and the family, and the love of comrades.

For a woman to speak publicly was hard to do and not common. Even in my time men got up and left and had meetings in the hall when a woman had the floor.

At the time, middle-class oppression gave a class image and sexual inferiority to women and made a cult of the elite, the superior persons. Women reflected their oppressor. They were oppressed even in the unions by the male power structure. The patriarchal image engendered images of the female as salable, frivolous. Sexual prostitution as well as marriage oppressed the woman. Mother Jones embodied and made visible a future woman, a warrior also, equal in struggle beside men.

She spoke to me and made visible, when I was 14, the true nature of the female power as equal and nourishing and necessary to the making of the human being of the future. The woman, she said, must be equal in the future communal expression of a global family. In the form and force of being a woman, the reflecting power of women, the conceiving power of not only the future child but of the communal desire and gestation, embracing our humanity, our passionate strength and love.

No one who heard her or saw her forgot her. Such a catalyst as Mother Jones lives in us all—a matron of the living seed, the living protein of the love of comrades. ■