

A SPECTER IS HAUNTING AMERICA

A weekly column dealing with issues of politics and ethics,

By: Richard Curtis

This section contains material from when I first started writing op/ed pieces with regularity between 1993 and 1996). At first they were sporadic, and then I finally decided to write monthly. A local paper called the "Colorado Daily" started using some of them in 1994, so there are a couple of references to it as the pieces were intended for that audience.

(1993)

Farewell but not Goodbye

It may be that the much despised Bolsheviki may fail at last, but let me say to you that they have written a chapter of glorious history. It will stand to their eternal credit." -- Eugene V. Debs, September 11, 1918.

My wife and I moved recently, and found the perfect spot for this poster of a portrait of Lenin done in tiles she gave me last year for my birthday. It is a very warm piece, done in reds, yellows, and oranges. It livens up the space in our office/spare bedroom.

While my wife and I were unpacking she left this greenish glass thing, which looks like a large drop of water that's about to fall, lying around. I just recently happened across it, picked it up, and saw it suddenly as a teardrop. Well, I took the teardrop and hung it by one of the top corners of that poster of Lenin. Somehow it seems to sum it all up for me.

I think a great many people who never really thought much about what the USSR meant, except for the possibility of nuclear confrontation, are realizing the same sadness with its passing. I have felt a real sadness, and not just because people are suffering and will have to rebuild what capitalists will inevitably destroy for profit.

We have lost something in the power and possibility that the USSR represented. A great many socialists have questioned Lenin's concept of the state, and the role of the state in the transition to communism--and that caused many divisions where we needed unity in struggle. Now the real existing state is gone--and somehow so is the argument (although some romantics might never give it up). It is now unavoidable that workers need this power. Even though the USSR did not always live up to its promises, it was a source of aid to people struggling all over the world, it was a source of culture and scientific advancement, and it was even a refuge if necessary.

We lost more than people ever would have imagined. People will continue to struggle for justice, there is no way the capitalist class can really prevent it, but there is so

much that will have to be rebuilt, and so much which cannot ever be taken for granted again.

Lenin said that everyone should strive to be as radical as reality itself. I think that is the challenge of 1993, to recognize how radical the times in which we live are and respond as best we can. I, for one, still believe, "as the revolutionary fathers did in their time, that a change was due in the interests of the people, that the time has come for a better form of government, an improved system, a higher social order, a nobler humanity, and a grander civilization" (Debs said that too).

The Fabric of Society

In the town in which I live, the fabric of society seems to be unraveling. Perhaps, it is not just our little corner of society, but a sign of much larger and more ominous things to come. A specter is haunting America.

A couple of months ago a woman who works as a Methodist minister was beaten severely. She claimed the beating was part of a larger pattern of intimidation and assaults on her family by some local youths. The community was extremely disturbed by the photos of her from her hospital bed, head bandaged. But there was something wrong with her story and the local police were unable to do much, and eventually people let it go.

Well, in mid April, five teenagers, from the same high school as the alleged assailants of the minister, beat a local college student nearly to death for no particular reason. The college student exchanged some words with the youths; they chased him and beat him. He is still in the hospital in a drug-induced coma, with part of the frontal lobe of his brain removed after five hours of neurosurgery. No one knows if he will be himself, someone else, or no one at all when the coma is terminated.

What does it mean when five high schools students nearly commit murder for no reason at all?

I asked the son of one of my co-workers this question. He is a student at the other high school in town, the more blue-collar one. The kids who did the beating come from the more affluent of the two. Some people in town say the students at the affluent school have a general attitude problem, and that these newsworthy events are only the tip of the iceberg.

Anyway, my co-worker's son told me that his peers are shocked and outraged. They believe some fighting among students is inevitable, and nothing to be too concerned about. But, these five crossed a line they shouldn't have. And some of his peers are talking about revenge. Not because they know the college student in the coma, but because that line shouldn't have been crossed.

At first, I was impressed by the talk of principles among these students. But then I realized that vigilante justice is a further, deeper, sign of the same problem. And then I was really depressed.

What does it mean when high school students feel so disconnected from the rule of law that their response to a break down in the fabric of society is to pull harder at the tear?

The reactionary response of these students is a sign that they have lost, or never learned, respect for social bonds. This is not surprising for children raised during the so-

called "Reagan Revolution." They learned, from their earliest days, to prey on the weak, to profit from others, and that society cares only for the wealthy elite.

I cannot blame these students--or rioters in LA--for their disconnected attitude towards the rest of humanity. If society does not care for them, why should they care?

It will take time, and there will be more bloodshed no doubt, but it is time for a real revolution, a revolution of values in America. The religious right talks of needing values. They are correct, in a way. However, it is not their sick, isolationist, inward looking "family" values, but human and social values that we need.

A predatory society breeds predators. Obviously. But there is no reason why we must accept this predatory society. It is time for change, time for Americans to demand their birthright, time to demand that our society live up to its full potential. "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we [deserve to] have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (from the "Communist Manifesto" chapter 2).

The Scourge of Drugs

In its seventy years the USSR managed to create a largely drug free society. The news has started to come in about the general deterioration of that accomplishment. With the new and brutally oppressive capitalist culture there is the development of patterns of drug abuse similar to our own culture.

And in the fall of 1993 they will begin a massive program to infuse the most widespread and dangerous drug of all into the Russian schools--organized religion, (Daily Camera, 7/23/93). God help us.

Marx, and others before him, observed that religion is used to placate the masses of people while the ruling class exploits them for their labor, lives, and futures. In the new Russia, the population is becoming restless. They are seeing first hand the inhumanity, the cruelty of capitalism that they had only heard about for so long.

The USSR had created a society, which, due to its own problems, reached the point of not believing the stories they heard about other cultures. Americans are, generally, more easily swayed due to the overwhelming nature, and complete corporate control of the mass media. In the former USSR ordinary people still ran things, so the control was not as complete.

Anyway, the Russian people didn't believe that capitalism could be so utterly valueless and cruel. They were so very, very wrong. And now things are becoming desperate.

Heroin is flooding in from Afghanistan (those old friends of the CIA), and "conservative" Christians have been invited to establish programs in Russian schools, to teach their political values--i.e. Fascist like obedience to the state and political economy, the seeking of rewards not in this life but in the mythical next, the subservience of women and minorities, and the division of civil rights between those with money and those without.

If Russians didn't understand capitalism before, they will now. How many will suffer with poverty, homelessness, malnutrition, lack of health care, crime, and corruption we cannot say. How many will learn their lesson, we also cannot say. If there is a God, he, she or it will hopefully have mercy on the Soviet Union and inspire a new

and better revolution before it is too late. And if there is no God, I hope they can do it on their own--soon.

Have you heard of the "Mexican Miracle" yet?

Late capitalism is a global phenomenon that requires a global effort to maintain popular support for the system and its exploitation. Part of this support is the simple absence of an armed struggle against the system. To do this capitalists and their intellectual puppets present capitalism and its supporting ideological constructions as natural and logically consistent.

Part of seeming natural involves pretending those bourgeois policies, especially liberal economic ones (declining state intervention), actually work. Now, obviously this is untrue. Just look around you, how many people do you see who are un- or under-employed? Homeless? Hungry? Illiterate? Alienated and unhappy? Quite a few if your part of the country is anything like mine.

Anyway, I bring all this up because I just ran across an AP wire story, in my local paper, about a recent International Chamber of Commerce meeting in Cancun, Mexico. The story went on and on about the so-called "Mexican Miracle". Which, as near as I can figure, is that rich people in Mexico are living better than ever, and the Chamber is really excited about the example Mexico sets for other Third World countries.

In reality the "Miracle" is that there has not been open armed revolt in the streets yet. Since Mexico liberalized its trade policies in the early 1980's, real wages for most Mexicans have declined 60%; Mexico City's air quality became the worst in the world, the number of homeless people in Mexico City surpassed 10 million, and state governors now have para-military troops who harass, beat, kidnap, and murder the people in local communities who protest their improvised condition.

So, why would the AP and the International Chamber of Commerce go on and on about Mexico's "progress"? Because the progress is real, it just depends whose point of view you use. Rich people are richer; union membership in Mexico is declining, exploitation is increasing, and with the prospect of a free trade agreement with the U.S. and Canada (NAFTA), things are really looking up (for the rich). So the ruling class thinks liberalization of the economy is wonderful.

And they want us to think so too.

V.I. Lenin said that ideologies are, first and foremost, political and social programs and the concepts on which they are based. NAFTA is a prime example of bourgeois ideology (economic liberalism) being pushed on the working class of three countries.

The Italian Communist philosopher Antonio Gramsci wrote that rather than becoming the ideology of the masses, the philosophy articulated by the dominant class' intellectuals operates by helping to thwart the development of "common" sense into "good" sense or class consciousness. Which means that most people know that they are better off when they work together, but they sometimes forget that this is a political idea, an anti-bourgeois, liberal economy, kind of idea.

Capitalists have a very strong class-consciousness, they get together for national and international conferences all the time; G-7 meetings, the International Chamber, the Democrat and Republican National Committees, etc. Workers don't seem to get together

nearly as much these days--and we can see the results: the rich are richer, unemployment is up, poverty is up, racist violence is up, homelessness is up, etc.

We can buy into their "liberal" economic theory or not, they will keep pushing it. Either way, it's still all just a self-serving lie, like the Mexican Miracle.

Labor Struggles

As is my custom I was sitting on the porch the other day thinking about life, the struggles for justice, and world politics. As is my preference, though not my usual fortune, a thought occurred to me. With the passage of NAFTA we have entered a new era.

European workers have been confronting this new era for a few years now. Their response has been to identify with national issues, to reject the internationalism of the European common market. After all, when we talk about markets we are talking about the opportunity for capitalists to make more money, usually by driving wages and workers' living standards down. Asian workers have been confronting similar issues, but we are woefully uninformed of the full extent of their activity.

In the era of nations, workers could protect themselves in their nation state. That is changing. The geopolitical and economic role of the nation state is giving way to the continent--North American, European, and Asian. It seems likely, then, that the level of exploitation experienced in the early 1900's may be returning. And this time the capitalists have their own experience of imperialist superexploitation from which to begin their new assault. Superexploitation will soon apply to all workers--that's the logic of the global market.

In the new global economy the connections between workers are changing. The Europeans are resisting it, but we, the Canadians, and Mexicans failed to resist. We are being integrated into one giant market. This changes the substance of our individual national labor markets.

At the turn of this century workers began to organize in the trades on a national scale. If capital could move across the country then labor had to be organized across the country. And that movement made great strides, much of which today's workers take for granted (minimum wage, the eight-hour day, government recognition of the bargaining process, etc.). As we look to the turn of the next century we must take stock of the new situation, of these new developments.

It is true that capital has been able to move across national boundaries for some time, but that movement was limited by tariffs and trade regulations. NAFTA changes everything--well maybe not everything, but it changes a lot. Capital will have new freedom of movement across entire continents. The imperialist powers are all getting ready for this new era, the USA here, Germany in Europe, and Japan in Asia.

Workers must now accept that these things are our future. Some battles are lost, but the war goes on. The time for reaction is over; we must no longer be surprised. It is time to anticipate effects. We have always been very good at anticipating effects. One will be lower wages and lower standards in many spheres of life, environment, worker safety, etc.

It is time for us, US workers and especially Communists, to embrace our Canadian and Mexican counterparts. It is time for a series of continental meetings of

workers and Communists. It may even be time for new kinds of party organizations, maybe a Communist coalition organized on a continental scale.

With every new development class conflicts intensify. And every intensification of class struggle brings new opportunities for organization, change, and--yes--socialism. It is time for a special effort to reach out to our continental brothers and sisters. We are witnessing the dawn of the possibility of not just US Socialism but North American Socialism.

(January 1994)

The King of Cocaine

By now you must have heard that Pablo Escobar, the Colombian king of cocaine, is dead. How many of you out there actually thought, "What a shame," when you heard the news? Raise your hands. Be honest.

Seriously though, if you're like me--and very few people admit to it--you thought that Escobar could avoid the police and military forever. He had become a kind of folk hero, even here.

Now I never approved of Escobar's activities or even his politics, but when someone is villianized, insulted, and hunted down by the army and intelligence services of at least two known to be corrupt governments, one begins to think that he may be a good guy.

How many of you thought that? Be honest.

Pablo Escobar had been born poor, and yet became one of the wealthiest people in this hemisphere, doing something that, let's face it, was part of the activities of the establishment. It is no longer reasonable to argue that the CIA is not the world's largest drug supplier. Pablo just got on their bad side.

So he went from hero, politician, businessman, and drug lord, to fugitive. Somehow we identify with these fugitives. After all he had done what the CIA and Colombian government wanted of him. He succeeded, and then they turned on him. And he had the audacity to hide in style for a couple of years.

The Columbian army finally killed him. It sounded like the end of "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid," at first. But he really was scum. That's not my point. He came to be a hero to many.

Why?

I have an idea here. Perhaps, we identify with his struggle against the establishment. He played their game and They just used him and then threw him out. Much like They do with the rest of us. "They" is, of course, large business interests; the people who created and use the services of the CIA; the people who want cheap labor in the third world, friendly governments, lax labor laws, and no environmental protection. This is what the CIA creates and maintains, often with drug money, isn't it?

So They used Pablo and then killed him. They use Us too. The stakes for most people are lower though. Ordinary people just make things, provide some service, etc. and then live an alienated, substandard, over worked, and underpaid existence--that's the

ones lucky enough to have jobs. "Us" is people who work for a living, people who weren't born to own major corporations, factories, etc.

We identify with the Us, not the They. And it was They who killed Pablo. We identify with Pablo because somewhere deep down we know that things that are in Their interest are not in our interest. And if Pablo was no longer in Their interest he must be in our's, right? This is called class-consciousness. It is a very nascent form of it, no doubt. But it shows the truth.

That which is in the interest of the capitalist class is not in the interest of the working class. Write that down, it is a guide for living, voting, history, for understanding! It is a powerful tool that They do not want you to have or use.

Try it a few situations, you'll see what I mean. Managed Competition, free trade, lax labor laws, the CIA, reduced environmental standards, the embargo of Cuba, the Cold War, alternatives to NAFTA suggested by DSA, etc. In all of these examples the interests of working people are on one side (against), and the capitalists are on the other (for).

This is class struggle.

You might have noticed that I snuck in the real topic of this essay just then. I don't really care about Escobar; I just wanted to criticize DSA for supporting any kind of free trade agreement. They think that because you add a couple of restrictions that liberal economics, market economics, capitalism, will suddenly function in the interest of working people--not so. Class struggle.

The Democratic Socialists of America, and Dave Anderson (who is generally a good guy), argue that we should compromise and accept liberal, that is unrestricted, economics; that allowing capitalists something just less than a free hand will somehow help working people. Can you say Reaganomics?

Obviously, history shows us that this is not true, that these compromises actually increase suffering, and that only when working people stand up for their interests, against those of the class enemy, only then do living standards improve; i.e. the eight hour day, union shops, collective bargaining, environmental regulations, worker and consumer safety laws, etc.

In the 1990's, there is no longer the political space or time for DSA to be on the wrong side. It is time for workers, for ordinary people, to stand up for their rights and their interests, to walk onto the stage of history. Only with the full rejection of policies that serve the capitalist class will we be truly free. Our reaction to Escobar's death shows that we know this to be true.

That's the American way, isn't it? Working for that which is in your best interest. For most of us this means accepting the reality and historical necessity of Class Struggle.

(February 1994)

The Year of Violence

Something is clearly amiss in America, even in Colorado. Colorado may not be much like New York or California. Denver's 2 million people seems small by comparison. We don't have Harlem, but we do have Five Points. I guess every American city is like that now. And last year, it got ugly.

The big Denver papers dubbed 1993 the "Year of Violence." In that we may not be alone. Everyone from the President on down is talking about crime and violence, but nobody ever asks "Why?" Why?

According to Gus Hall, "The causes of this seemingly senselessly violent society elude most of us because those who own and run everything in our society have a stake in making it look as if we are simply a society run amok--a country filled with violent people who have abandoned 'family values', 'religious guiding principles', and our 'duty and obligations' to society."

This is the only rational thing anyone in politics has said about crime in years. Doesn't it strike you as obscene that in all the hysterics about crime nobody, not the President, not Governor Romer, not the big media, nobody asks "why"? And thus, as Gus observed, the problems do not get solved. How convenient (for some)!

Last year the State of Colorado was due some money from the Feds--about \$40 million--and after our "Summer of Violence" our "Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen" in the legislature felt the need to address the problem, at least to the degree their unexercised reactionary minds could: "Let's lock more people up," were the cries from the capital.

So I got to thinking about money and crime. I thought we all knew by now that poverty causes crime, I thought we figured that out a century or so ago. Obviously Colorado's legislators did not. Even Clinton still says crime is caused by the values a neighborhood seems to embody. But then again, almost everything he says is a lie, like Nixon but less consistently. I thought everybody knew that too.

If poverty causes crime why do all of the suggestions from the ruling class' government all involve locking people up, even though that costs more than reducing poverty?

And here in Colorado we have even more inane ideas about dealing with (not reducing or eliminating) crime. One whacked out representative decided that what we need is more concealed handguns in the general population. The argument is that if more people are armed then criminals will think harder and longer about committing crimes.

Which may be true, but of Denver's 130 homicides last year less than 20 involved circumstances which might be covered by this rationalization. That's about 15%. Most of the rest involved the situations of poverty, despair, and the predictable human responses to both. At last report this bill to make concealed handgun permits easy to get sailed through its first committee hearing.

That's still just a sidelining, their real plan is to lock everyone up.

In Colorado it costs between \$50,000 and \$130,000 per bed to build a new prison, depending on the level of security. Further, the state spends between \$20,000 and \$35,000 per year per prisoner. This extra \$40 million that Colorado is spending would, if used just for construction in the already over crowded prison system, provide an additional 400 prison beds.

By the way, this amount is about half of the state average of what President Clinton wants to spend on Bush's abandoned and obviously ineffective Empowerment Zones program. Further, just in Colorado, we are already looking at a shortage of 2,700 prison beds in the next five years--that's \$200,000,000 in construction. Imagine how many jobs could be created with that much money.

The situation is, then, that the government feels pressure to reduce the level of violence in society--did I mention yet that domestic violence just in little suburban Boulder County doubled in the last eight years--but their only responses are to lock up millions of us, arm the rest of us, and then half-hearted attempts to alleviate the cause of the problem, the violence of poverty.

Does anyone, after thinking about this, really believe that the government of money, by money, for money, is interested in reducing the level of violence or crime in our society?

What is wrong in America?

Has the end of the Cold War, or perhaps more accurately, the cumulative effects of 40 years of Cold War, really brought us to a place where rational discourse and logical solutions to difficult problems are not even suggested, even by Democrats? I read recently that the Republicans are worried that they will lose their share of the fraction of Americans who vote because even they can't figure out the difference between themselves and the Democrats anymore. Welcome to the New World Order!

(March 1994)

Environmentalism and Change

I was covering an environmental protest the other day and got to thinking about change. Clearly, the environment is one of the most daunting and important issues of our day--after all we are poisoning ourselves, slowly killing ourselves and rendering unlivable the world of our children. But environmental change is often slow, and more often inhibited by modern economic constraints. The task is great and requires a sophisticated understanding of society and historical change.

But what is the environmentalists' method of change? What is their philosophy of history? What is their theory of human nature? Their epistemology (theory of knowledge)?

I have this long-standing theory that we are all, for the most part, Marxists. Which is to say, we see knowledge as being derived from experience--from our senses, and we use the logic of dialectics in our everyday life. But most of us are not trained philosophers and our society inhibits real critical thought, as such we don't apply these theories with any strenuous consistency.

It is the role of Marxist activists, in part, to make conscious these pre-conscious modes of thinking, and to show how they illuminate the world around us. So, why don't environmentalists talk about Marx, or economic theory, or revolution?

Like most social activists, environmentalists are aware that the capitalist system is antithetical to their interests. Capitalism's only value is profit--at any cost. These costs include people, countries, cultures, and the natural world. Sadly (and conveniently for some), environmentalists, like many people, have probably been deluded through 70 years of distortions about socialism and might still think that economic development itself is the enemy of the natural world. But this is just another lie, like so many that have become common in our culture.

The reality is that socialism, as radical democracy, values whatever people value. In historical experience this has been national survival and protection from a warring

enemy (imperialism), and has often been at the cost of the environment. This was not a logical necessity, but a choice (and perhaps a too narrow one).

The difference between capitalism and socialism is that socialism allows for choices in a society's values. And socialism encourages human values, whereas capitalism necessarily destroys them.

For example, and this is my point, Karl Marx's own theories imply a necessary and logical connection between the human and natural world. This is best expressed in his technical term, "species-being." Marx, like most of us, did not believe in "a" human nature. Rather, materialist philosophy holds that people are what their environments make them. A criminal society creates criminals. A society that's only value is the efficient generation of profit will destroy everything in the search for maximum profits.

Species being, just in the words, implies a connection between humans and the natural world. All animals have a species-being. For some species it is more rooted in instinct, for some in the dialectical relationship between consciousness and the world. We are decision-making animals, and those decisions are based on values. Capitalists value the natural world only as a resource. They are separate from the world, enemies of the natural world.

Socialists believe that human beings are by nature products of the natural world, at home in and with the world, dependent and inspired. Our species-being is a product of the natural and human worlds. We are a species in nature like all others.

If environmentalists want to save humanity and--more importantly--the natural world then they are going to have to throw off the mental shackles of anti-communism and return to their critical, socialist roots. Nineteenth century environmentalists knew capitalism would destroy everything it touched and for this reason lobbied governments to set aside large tracts of land--national parks.

Our interests--humanist and naturalist--overlap. Socialists and Environmentalists both want to make rational, conscious, and democratic the decision-making processes of modern life, of modern economies. The truth is we have the same enemy--the capitalist class and its cruel and self-serving economic system, and the same goal--a human and organically connected social order. It is time to get together. We need each other.

(April 1994)

Guilt

What does it mean to live in a country that supported genocide, but has never acknowledged its guilt?

By 1943 it was undeniable to the military and political leadership of the United States and Britain that the Nazi government had designed, built, and was operating massive killing machines, now know as Death Camps. These facilities sole purpose was to efficiently end the lives of human beings on a massive scale. They succeeded in killing some 13 million people, 6 million of them Jews, in a well thought out, well financed attempt to kill every Jew in Europe.

My problem, and I was reminded of it by the recent deportation of a former camp guard from a small city north of Denver, is that the U.S. and British governments have never acknowledged that they could have helped but

did not. The U.S. War Department even adopted an intentional, and secret, policy of non-action on issues related to rescuing Jews.

Locally and internationally we are reminded of the lesson of the Holocaust -- moral responsibility. After Auschwitz human society has agreed that all people have an obligation to recognize and resist actions which are clearly immoral. Does failing to provide assistance, when it is easily within ones ability, constitute a moral failure, and in this case a crime against humanity?

Saul Rosenthal, the western regional director of the Anti-Defamation League, does not think so, at least as the issue relates to institutions and dead individuals -- I called him to ask. After all, the people who choose to let European Jewry -- and 7 million other people -- die, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chamberlain, have long since passed on. Are we, as a society, guilty of crimes against humanity for not condemning these men as evil accomplices to the Nazi's "Final Solution"?

Personally, I find all of this very frustrating. Perhaps it is because I am, like those people who early on were arrested and imprisoned in the labor camps, a Communist. Political opponents of the Nazi regime were interned in Dachau as early as 1936. And given the meek acceptance of guilt by the U.S. government to its crimes against citizens of Japanese descent, let alone American Indian or African descent, and mid-1980's reports of plans by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to reactivate those old camps to inter political prisoners in the event of large scale opposition to the U.S. government, I can't help but worry about the future.

Unlike Rosenthal, I am not content that the U.S. government takes a hard line on former prison guards who lied to get into the country in the 1950's. The complicity runs deeper than he knows. For example, Talcott Parsons, the "Father of American Sociology", spent his early post-war years helping Army Intelligence smuggle Nazi war criminals into the U.S. so they could be used in the hostilities against the U.S.S.R. And conveniently enough, Parsons' is best known for creating a sociology that provides rationalizations for class domination.

Some people wonder why anti-Soviet propaganda had the same tone, irrationality, and lack of truth as Nazi era anti-Jewish propaganda. And now we know why the U.S. Army's School of the Americas churns out soldiers who are constantly being named as leading figures in Latin American massacres, death squads, or attempts at a genocide of the Maya Indians. They learned it from the experts.

The history is that anything is permissible in the war against the working class, in Cold War. The ruling class here, and in Britain, used these criminals for their own purposes. They did not care that millions died, or that millions continue to suffer and die around the world as a result of their policies. The protection of privilege has no morality.

On April 6th, Vice President Al Gore said, "Those who did nothing share the blame for the Holocaust." I'm still waiting for him to admit that the government he represents could have done something, and can still do more to bring these criminals to justice. When the INS deports a former camp guard but continues to hide the people who planned and lead the extermination effort -- the people Army Intelligence and Dr. Parsons brought over -- they are part of a cover up, part of the problem -- and as guilty as those they hide.

If hypocrisy were trees, just on the actions of the U.S. government alone we could reforest the world. And that's a lot of trees.

(May 1994)

The War on Poverty

"The poorhouse is vanishing among us. Given a chance to go forward with the policies of the last eight years, we shall soon ... be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation."

--Herbert Hoover, Republican Presidential Candidate, 1928

"Fundamentally, the [capitalist] system has not demonstrated the capacity to solve one of the principal and most important problems of humanity: hunger."

--Bishop Samuel Ruiz, San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, 1994

There has been a lot of hype lately about the so-called "free market," and its alleged benefits to humanity. From the President down to individual Libertarians, people are talking about how we need the "free market" to save us from government, from inefficiency, from whatever.

The President wants a program of "managed competition" for health care because he alleges that this compromise "free market" approach will be the most efficient. But efficient at what? At providing health care, or at generating increasing profits for the wealthy few?

One fundamental conclusion, along the lines of what Dom Ruiz said above, is unavoidable -- it's all a scam. Capitalism doesn't work, can't work, never will work, and is not even intended to work. Think about this: if it worked, the rich would not be as rich, and we all know they won't let that happen, not without a fight.

Now by "work," I mean provide for the management of human society in a way in which all human beings can live with dignity and enjoying the human rights that are their birth right; these include (but are not limited to) housing, health care, education, jobs, pensions, physical safety, and a clean environment.

A few weeks ago I was watching the TV show, "The Simpsons," which happens to be a high quality, progressive form of entertainment. Anyway, one of the characters, Homer, speaking in the context of theories, said, "...socialism works in theory." I realize that on the surface he is expressing a widely held misunderstanding about historical change, and the causes of the collapse of the former Soviet Union. However, he was also acknowledging that socialism could have worked given the right application, and something else that is very important about contemporary politics.

Ever notice how you never hear anyone say, "Well, capitalism works in theory,"? Why? Because, capitalism doesn't work, even in theory! There is this one, basic, problem which tends to cause a myriad of others -- accumulation. The inevitable tendency in capitalism is the accumulation of wealth. By its own laws capital moves to where it can generate the greatest profit, never the greatest good. Why does everyone know the saying, "The rich get richer and the poor get poorer."? Because it's true!

The concentration of wealth causes other problems like poverty, malnutrition, destruction of the environment, violence, homelessness, etc. The people who own the means of production (capitalists) have control of the money, and as we all know "It takes

money to make money." Invariably money is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, over time, to varying degrees according to a cycle of general decline disguised by smaller cycles of relative prosperity (the 1860's, 1920's, and 1980's) and then depression (the 1870's, 1930's and 1990's).

So the ruling class needs an organization that will front for it, take the heat, and mediate the inevitable social discontent that arises from an unjust distribution of wealth. Government, contrary to the incredibly naive misconceptions of Libertarians, must exist to prevent class struggle from becoming open warfare.

The greatest minds of bourgeois economics fruitlessly devote their lives to attempting to figure a way out of this trap. It is inevitable, it has always happened, and will always happen. As long as we have capitalism we will have big government, and it will be a principal site of class struggle.

Even more cruelly, the system requires that some significant percentage of the population suffer from unemployment. We have all of these bizarre myths about unemployment, and its causes. But the reality is that millions of people in this country are kept unemployed, and why? Because if everyone had a job the market wages for labor would go up, profits would go down, and inflation would likely increase, further decreasing profits. Its not that owners want to hire everyone but can't create enough jobs, the system requires that millions of people be unemployed. It's sickening.

Think about it -- capitalism doesn't work. Even in theory! In a capitalist system there will always be, must always be poverty, homelessness, disease, violence, hunger, despair, etc. When the working classes here and around the world decide to confront this reality directly, then, and only then, will the poorhouse and hunger vanish.

(June 1994)

Hemp

Amazing though it may be to health advocates, smoking is still an issue. Recently I read that RJ Reynolds had decided to go on the offensive, defending its product line from "scurrilous" attacks--scurrilous in their view at least.

Perhaps the most rational discussion on the subject has been in the cartoon "Doonesbury," which has recently featured a principle character indicting tobacco company presidents for perjury for their recent testimony before congress. Is there anyone in the country who honestly believes that smoking is not a dangerous activity? The tobacco people may try to fight this but at some point reality will simply prevail, regardless of how much they spend on public relations.

And spending is actually the issue that intrigues me here. I, personally, smoke. But I am honest enough with myself to admit that this is a dangerous thing to do, fraught with risk. I compare it to mountain climbing, scuba diving, eating rich French food or beef. All of these things are dangerous, which is not to say that they should be criminalized, but it does mean that people who do it ought to acknowledge that it is their choice to do it, and if other people don't want to be around second hand smoke then they shouldn't have to. And we must also acknowledge that there is line, and some things--if we as a society decide--ought not to be allowed.

The problem is that there is no rational discussion on these issues. The tobacco people show up to discuss legislation and just lie. Now if you or I went to congress and lied, we'd end up in jail. But these people are rich, the owners of major industry, and in America they can do as they like.

There is another smoking type issue that exposes this same basic contradiction in our society: marijuana. It turns out that hemp, as it is known generically, is the single most useful plant in the world. You can make hemp rope, paper, cardboard, clothing, fertilizer, high protein food, vegetable oil, and in fact nearly anything related to fibers or textiles (the sails, ropes, and rigging on the U.S.S. Constitution, for example, were made of hemp), but people also smoke it to get high. The corporate media pretends that hemp is illegal because of its mild mood altering properties, but this is not the case.

Hemp was criminalized in the 1930's, at a time when petrochemical companies were just discovering the myriad of uses for petroleum. The DuPont family (in particular) didn't want competition from hemp, so laws were passed. Sixty years later farmers around the world are rediscovering hemp, which can be grown with low or high THC levels (THC is an acronym for the psychoactive chemical in marijuana). Farmers in Europe have recently developed a low-THC strain that has big, thick stalks. These plants are great for textiles, but lousy for smoking.

Consider this: during World War II the government actually encouraged people to grow hemp, under special license, for the war effort--ropes, textiles, etc. But for some reason hemp cultivation is still illegal. We are destroying our forests for paper, poisoning our seas and air with petroleum derivatives, threatening the very survival of the planet, and why? Because conventional plastics can only be produced by huge corporations, whereas ordinary family farmers or anyone can grow hemp--it is a weed.

Money talks. Even when it comes to health, wellness, or survival, money rules. The capitalist class and their media pretend that we have democracy, but this is absurd. Democracy and class society are antithetical. So congress pretends to have discussion or debate, pretends to represent people, but they represent only money, and they compromise money's interests only when they have to.

The time will come when people get so sick of tobacco smoke that they will force congress to criminalize (or at least severely limit) cigarette smoking, and the time will come when people get so concerned about the health of the planet that they will force congress to decriminalize hemp. But these will both be monster battles, against some of the largest and richest companies on earth. The government of money, by money, and for money responds to the masses only when we rise up. The time is near, and these two curiously opposite issues show the way.

Wouldn't it just be easier if we could have real democracy, if we could have rational discussions about issues, decide issues on the basis of their merit, their impact on people and the environment? Someday... I think they call it socialism.

(July 1994)

The problem with the American political system, at least one of the major problems, is that our language is vacuous. We can't rationally discuss political or economic ideas. Our political culture has been reduced to jingoism and sound bites.

For example, there has been a recent increase in the activity level, and power, of neo-fascist movements--here and in Europe. Even the capitalist press is alarmed about neo-nazis in Germany, neo-fascist political parties in Italy, etc. But how many of us have any idea what the political programs of the fascists are? In our culture, we know that Nazism (which is a particular type of fascism) is bad, but other than its racism we don't talk about why this is so.

Leon Trotsky, in one of his more lucid moments in the 1930's, said fascism is: "the expression of a profound structural crisis of late capitalism, and results from the tendency to 'organize' the whole of social life in a totalitarian fashion." He was referring explicitly to Hitler in Germany, Franco in Spain, and Mussolini in Italy. The crucial factor is that fascist political movements offer social stability in a way that is friendly to capitalist business interests.

More generically, according to my copy of the Columbia Encyclopedia (1983): "The major concepts of fascism include opposition to democratic and socialist movements; racist ideologies, such as anti-Semitism; aggressive military policy; and belief in an authoritarian leader who embodies the ideals of the nation. Fascism generally gains support by promising social justice to discontented elements of the working class ..., and social order to financial interests. While retaining class interests and usually protecting capitalist and landowning interests...."

I am reminded here, particularly, of the rise in power of the "religious right". Even the mainstream media has expressed concern over the recent "take overs" of the Republican Party in Virginia and Texas. These so-called extremists' rhetoric is decidedly fascist, but I am not convinced that this represents anything new in Republican politics. It may be, simply, that a deepening economic crisis brings to the surface that which has always lurked below.

The pundits and "moderate" Republicans denounce the religious right, often in the person of senatorial candidate Oliver North, complaining that right-wing divisions could split the Republican party, presumably into a true capitalist party and a sister fascist party. Would this be such a bad thing? To the wealthy, I suppose it would.

Capitalists achieve social and political dominance by convincing elements of the working class to support their programs. If the uninformed and reactionary elements of the working class went it alone, they would soon discover the basic fallacies of the fascist program. A scary prospect indeed, but it would never really happen. In the real world the capitalist class sees the value of fascist policies, and while individuals may not support the violence inherent in fascism, they will inevitably support those who support capitalist class interests. The Republican Party won't split--not on this issue at least.

In the real world, capitalists need the social stability fascism provides, whether in the person of Oliver North in America, or Alessandra Mussolini in Italy. Since the heyday of supposed "family values" our economy has continued a general decline, with a nearly fifty percent increase in the official unemployment rate--from 4.5 percent in the 1950's to 6.5 percent today, with a high of 7.3 percent in the 1980's (**Political Affairs**, May 1994). This, of course, is deceptive because even employed people are poverty stricken today, with the number of workers paid less than \$13,000 a year having doubled between 1979 and 1990.

We have only two choices; share the wealth or suppress the discontent. Which do you think capitalists will choose?

The real question, though, is which solution will the rest of us choose?

(August 1994)

A couple of things have recently come together for me, pieces of a strange puzzle falling into place. I recently left a temporary job that involved giving people suggestions as to where they could find a place to live, a place to rent. I happen to be something of an expert on the rental market in the local area, and as a result have developed some clear opinions about companies that rent housing--especially to students. One of these companies, in my opinion, has clearly established itself as the worst, the most greedy, the least caring, and the most abusive.

At any rate, as a part of this job I would make suggestions to people, offer them a bit of my experience and expertise. My boss overheard me advising some people, one day, that they should avoid renting from "Company V" (lets call it that, X is over used now anyway). She, my boss, told me not to tell people that they should avoid Company V, and that I should be completely neutral in my suggestions--even when asked my personal opinion. And why? Because if word got back to Company V that my former employer was telling people not to rent from them, they (Company V) would never do business with my former employer.

I don't know about you, but this bothered me. I understand my boss' point of view--its just good business. But the implication is that I should lie to protect her business interests. You may have noticed I have even avoided referring to the offending property management company by name due to our complicated, pro-corporate, liable laws. In essence I was required, as part of my job, to send people to a company that I though was unworthy of their business because someone, somewhere stood to make money.

It seems to me that this is a cornerstone of capitalist relations. Everything comes to be valued in and through the market. Capitalism is thus fundamentally amoral (without morality). I realize that capitalism is often immoral as well, in the sense of doing evil deeds: e.g. owners lowering safety standards in a plant to cut costs even though workers will die. The only morality (if you can call it that) in capitalism is money: if it makes money it is good. The system doesn't care about people, about their lives, their pain, their dreams -- only money.

I hadn't thought about work in these terms before but this experience is actually very common. We all do things we don't want to, or believe shouldn't be done, because someone, somewhere stands to make money (sometimes ourselves). For example, I took that job, the one mentioned above, to escape a different one. For three years I worked at a small school that prepares people from other cultures for graduate work. This is, in theory, a good thing--contributes to multi-culturalism in the Boulder area, etc. But it happens that the management uses business organization theories from the Dark Ages.

The president of this place comes off as a relatively decent, if weak spirited and, therefore, incompetent person. But some of the people who work for him are downright mean, self centered, and greedy. These abusive people are still with the organization because they bring in money--which, when last I checked, was my point.

You can be as obnoxious, cruel, or evil as you like in capitalist America, if you produce. Mistreating people, mismanagement on a grand scale, even fraud and murder,

are acceptable from people who play the game and make someone money. There is something clearly wrong with this, and it just seems to be getting worse and worse. Now before the editor of this open minded publication gets a bunch of letters full of misspelled words complaining that capitalism doesn't have the exclusive on mismanagement, let me point out something: Capitalism's only purpose is to make some people (capitalists) rich -- feeding people, preserving the environment, equality, justice, peace, etc. are antithetical to this pursuit.

Within capitalist logic, there is no way to criticize the practices of my former bosses. According to capitalist (a)morality, my last boss was only being a good business manager, avoiding the possibility of future threats to income; she just has to lie to do it. The president of the educational organization is practicing sound business management by retaining productive employees; he just has to encourage abuse to do it.

"Good business practices" force people to sacrifice their morality to the almighty dollar. And -- on an even more sickening level -- this giving up of one's morality is rewarded, not doing so is punished. My wife recently put it this way: as middle class American youth we had to decide whether our lives would be devoted to making money - - or not. You too, the reader, can sell stuff, advertise it, protect it in court, manage its production, or you can do something meaningful with your life. This choice comes at cost. My wife and I both chose to devote our lives to education, and so far we haven't crossed the poverty line. In the end, though, capitalism forces every working person to whore himself or herself out to (someone else's) profit.

(September 1994)

For the past few months, I have been writing editorial pieces, which this fine journal occasionally runs. The editor, Clint Talbott, prides himself on offering a broad range of views on important issues. As I intend to continue my submissions, it seems timely -- with the beginning of a new school year -- to explain the nature of my views, and why I think they are worth his running and you reading.

In the past people have responded to some of the things I've said without a clear understanding of what I meant. Sometimes this is my fault because I don't have the time to discuss some points in full. In this column I'll try to explain the basics, the foundation of what I'll be writing in the future.

My views fall under the category of Marxist-Leninist. And even this is misleading because the term doesn't acknowledge, explicitly, the significance of Frederick Engles.

Some people may have tuned out already because Karl Marx and Vladimir Illich Lenin have been so falsely maligned in our culture. Distortions aside, Marx is credited with developing a philosophical system based on materialism that is applicable in the modern world.

All of us have our own ideas, and categories can confuse as well as clarify. Some things are important to us, some things very important, others not at all. For instance, if you are African-American, issues relating to improving the condition of racial minorities would most likely be very important to you. In this regard we can safely say that a high percentage of non-white people think issues of racial equality are very important.

We respond intellectually, ethically, politically to issues which directly affect our lives. Our experience determines the way we think about things. This is Materialism. It is not new to Marx, but he applied Materialism to the task of understanding history. In Marx's view history flows, it has movement; as the Buddhists say, "You can't step into the same river twice." According to Engels, this flow exists also in nature and in the processes of thought. Thus Marxism is simply a short word for Historical Materialism. "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it." -- Karl Marx, 1845

The philosophy is important, and I mention it here to lay that foundation I said was otherwise lacking. However, the real importance of Marxism is that it demands action. The world is fluid, moving, so we can change things. Since the subject matter of Marxism is history, it demands that people act over time to make the world a better, more just place. And the world can be a more just place, Marx argued, if we organize our economies around public ownership rather than private ownership -- if we choose socialism.

This is where Lenin came in. He is probably even more often, and more confusedly, maligned in our culture than Marx. His significance lies in applying Marx's ideas about acting in history to our particular historical period. These ideas are many and varied, but in short they involve political parties and are the foundation of Communist parties.

The reason, then, that I write, and that Communism is still an alternative, still an issue, is because democracy is about people deciding. Unarguable lots of people have been deciding they would rather have socialism than capitalism for over a hundred and fifty years now.

If you are wealthy, if you own factories and businesses, you probably feel that capitalism is okay. Wealthy people usually do, private ownership means the wealthy few have most of the money, and the power. Since I am a worker -- I work for a salary, a wage, for someone else -- I think things would be better if we all shared the power. I am at the heart of it a democrat. If money is power, and democracy is about sharing power, then we have to more evenly distribute the money too.

Marx called the conflict between these opposing views on wealth and democracy class struggle. He said that owners think alike because they have the same reality -- the same experience. Workers, also, share common experiences and interests, these interests being the opposite of the owners. Only one group can have society organized in the way that benefits itself most at a time. Thus we still have Class Struggle.

In the months that come I hope you will look for this one person's ideas about how Class Struggle manifests itself in our current historical experience. Next month I will discuss the hot topic of population growth, and why its obvious solutions -- progressive historical solutions -- show the conflict between capitalists and workers, between democracy and domination, between exploitation and justice.

(October 1994)

"Voters quickly forget what a man says." -- Richard Nixon, President, capitalist America, ca. 1968.

"What luck for rulers that people do not think." -- Adolf Hitler, Chancellor, capitalist Germany, ca. 1938.

One of the criticisms of the allegedly communist leader Gorbachev is that he failed so utterly and completely to understand history. It may be that he was tapped into the mood of his country. The Soviet people were obviously disillusioned with the pace of progress at home. But what to do?

"What is to be done?" is the continuing question. The phrase itself is the title of one of V.I. Lenin's books. The question is always a difficult one, but clearly Gorbachev missed something important.

Many writers have commented on the loss of "class" and "class struggle" as analytic tools in contemporary scholarship. In our home country we are told continually that class doesn't matter. Even the owners have problems. Some alleged feminists prattle on about domestic abuse rates among the rich, as if capitalists and workers should relish their few shared experiences. Gorbachev must have been reading their books. It may be true, as he said, that human interests ought to take precedence, and do in the minds of many -- environmentalists come to mind here. But rational responses to global problems are often muted by other factors. Gorbachev was not mistaken in claiming that even capitalists have an interest in protecting our fragile environment. He was wrong in supposing that capitalists would place the same priority on these concerns as normal people.

All of that is history now. Quite obviously the class struggle goes on. Ironically, we see this especially clearly in Gorbachev's home country -- now a poverty stricken, miserable, violent, shadow of itself. History moves by the engine of class struggle -- the conflict between those few who own the vast majority of factories, businesses, and those of us who work for a living. As the old saying goes: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Sometimes the poor get organized and take back some of the wealth they produced for the owners -- for their food, clothing, homes. Sometimes the owners get organized and take even more of the wealth workers produce -- for their yachts, furs, vacation homes, etc. While profit rates for owners have grown dramatically in the last two decades, the real buying power of workers has actually declined 24%. This back and forth over how big a share of the national wealth will be held by workers has a history to it, a cycle, the way the economy has a cycle. For example, economists have been saying that we are in a recovery; housing starts up, more expensive new cars be produced, etc. But at the same time, real wages decline, prison incarceration rates are skyrocketing, poverty is increasing, unemployment is increasing, more and more people are uninsured, and on and on and on.

This happens every sixty years like clockwork. And each time there is an especially good chance that workers will get fed up with the lies, poverty, misery, and general suffering that characterize capitalist experience and will chuck the whole thing. In modern history this cycle has repeated three times now. In the 1870's, in the 1930's, and in the 1990's we have come especially close to collapse.

Interestingly, the culture has a thirty year cycle to its peaks. We all remember, or read about, the cultural activity of the 1960's. But what people often fail to appreciate is that this increased activity has a history; the 1870's, 1900's, 1930's, 1960's, and 1990's are

all periods of social turmoil. Radical change was elusive in the 1960's because the cultural activity coincided with a high in the global economic cycle. Change is more likely today, as it was in the 1870's and 1930's, because the cultural peak is coinciding with an economic trough.

These phenomena are global, too. In Germany the recently re-elected Kohl has announced his own Gingrich like plan to reduce the share of the national wealth held by workers. He and the reptilian "Newt" both want a "lean" state. In Italy the government is on the verge of paralysis over the millionaire president's TV holdings, corruption, and general misery of the population. There the workers are more organized than here.

We can bet, though, that the "lean" states of Germany and America will include increasingly larger expenditures for "intelligence" services and violence. Recently, the American people discovered, via someone's error (in our "democracy" people are not supposed to know these things) that the CIA's 1995 budget is in excess of THREE BILLION DOLLARS (the entire State Department got only two). Why? Class struggle.

The military is also asking for more and more money, to allegedly defend the country from ... (?). Actually they use the money to make sure that the minimum wages in Panama, and Haiti, and Thailand don't go up. You knew that didn't you? The purpose of the US military is to keep wages down. If the people in Haiti sewing our baseballs made more than \$0.13 per hour, imagine what that would do to someone's profits. Imagine what an increase would do for the Haitian people.

Into this period of history we step. What is to be done? Well, a lot of people, recently, have been joining the Communist Party USA -- in numbers not seen since (you guessed it) the 1930's -- joining the organized struggle for justice, for democracy, for socialism. It will be difficult, but this is our finest hour. We won't have this particular opportunity to make history again until 2050. We had better take advantage of it.

(November 1994)

Did anyone else out there notice the utter lack of intelligibility in this year's political campaigns? Here in Colorado we had two millionaires running for governor -- as if either of them understands the problems of working people.

The republican -- who was expected by nearly everybody in the country to lose -- spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on a media barrage telling us that he encouraged his daughter, as a second grader, to run track; and is pro-death penalty. All that money, and I never heard a single thing about why he should be governor, but he is prone to advocating unnecessary violence and state sanctioned murder.

Perhaps we all need a little reality check:

*According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics the number of households touched by crime has DECREASED 25% since 1975.

*17% of the inmates in Federal Prisons are there because of marijuana prohibition.

*Real wages for working Americans have DECLINED 20% since 1974.

*In 1992 45% of eligible Americans didn't bother voting, in 1994 it is estimated that figure will be 64%.

*22% of American children live in poverty, 5 million of them go hungry, and 10% of American families are able to eat what little they do only because of Food Stamps.

*There are 400% more people in prison today than in 1974.

*The wealthiest 1% of Americans now controls more wealth than the entire bottom 90% of us -- 37% of the national wealth.

*According to the Census Bureau, the number of Americans living in poverty has increase 21% in the last 15 years.

Maybe it's just me, but something is clearly wrong here. All of the major party political candidates advocated spending billions of dollars on prisons and police, while at the same time cutting programs which help ordinary people survive.

And some people say the class struggle is dead. What is the class struggle if not the fight over the allocation of the nation's wealth? That 1% is feeling like its existence is more precarious so they want more cops and prisons, but prisons do not make our neighborhoods safer -- they do make sure that disgruntled people are locked up rather than conducting armed revolts in the streets. I guess that is why all the millionaires support prison construction over education. There are 4 times as many people in U.S. prisons today than 20 years ago, and all the corporate media and bourgeois politicians can talk about is locking more and more of us up. How long can this go on?

The people at the Brookings Institute have figure out that at the current rate, by 2054 one-half of the U.S. population will be in prison. Who is going to pay for the prisons then? The rich don't pay taxes (they buy legislative favors), and those left of the half of us not in prison will be too poor to pay taxes. It's crazy.

What would happen if we asked 'why do we have crime' rather than just reacting to stories about it? 'Why' is a taboo word in American politics. Interestingly enough some people have asked 'why'. The problem may not be as intractable as we are lead to believe. According to Friedrich Engels, crime is the result of the competitiveness of our society, which gives rise to corporate crimes of fraud, negligence, etc., and crimes of subsistence by impoverished members of the working class. According to the early 20th century Dutch criminologist Willem Bongers, this competitiveness results in a rise of egoism manifest in the pursuit of individual self-interest to the detriment of others.

Karl Marx, writing over 130 years ago claimed that crime also serves certain class interests by alleviating the monotony of bourgeois existence (TV shows, movies, newspaper headlines), and by removing unemployed workers from the job market and employing others in law enforcement (thereby preventing competition from reducing wages too far). Crime and our social responses to it are a key battle in the class struggle in contemporary America. Are we, as a people, going to continue on the road of locking ever increasing numbers of ourselves in prison, or are we going to find the courage to address ourselves to exploring and eliminating the causes of crime?

The "Family Values" lobby seems to have come to dominate these discussions. I think it is obvious from their funding just whose interests they serve. But what really gets me is that so many people decide to not bother participating in the system, rather than simply confronting the self-serving stupidity of the current political culture. When the majority does not vote, we no longer have democracy. This may be well and good for that 1% and the protection of their wealth, but the rest of us are going to end up in prison if we let them set policy.

Life is about more than protecting other people's wealth, and it is high time that those of us not yet in prison get off our butts and take charge. The class struggle is ultimately about democracy. A capitalist economy cannot ever be truly democratic.

Since capitalism is about exploitation and the impoverishment of the masses, it is quit illogical to believe that a majority of people would freely choose to live that way.

We have the means to make a better country and a better world, but too many of us don't participate. I'm not saying I don't understand why this is. Many people now a days are working more, trying to find decent day care, provide food and clothing for themselves and their children -- all this is the class struggle too. If we are all working ourselves to death just to survive then the rich know we will be too busy to challenge the current structure of society.

So you, the reader out there, if you're not working for some sort of positive social change, why not? If your reason is that you are too busy, then maybe you just need to work for changes that would help you be less busy -- decent jobs with decent wages, day care, universal health care, free education, pensions, affordable housing, etc.

As The Boss himself, Bruce Springsteen, has said: **"If there is something you need, if there is something you want, you've got to raise your hand!"**

(December 1994)

One day in December a friend of mine was walking along the Boulder Creek path, and heard -- perhaps -- the most frightening thing I heard in all of 1994. She happened to be walking behind the newly retired University of Colorado head football coach, Bill McCartney. McCartney was discussing with his companions the possibility of running for the U.S. Senate seat soon to be vacated by a big-business protector named Hank Brown.

McCartney is best known -- outside of football -- as a co-founder of the "Promise Keepers" (PK for short). PK is a right wing, supposedly Christian (mostly conservative Protestant) organization that advocates, among other things, the subjugation of women to a fantasy ideal of patriarchal society.

PK has grown from a small local club to a large national organization that brings tens of thousands of people to the local area each year for a kind of "love-fest." Coach Mac is the star speaker -- the head advocate of a fundamentalist order in which white monied men rule. It is the ultimate 90's organization -- ignorant, hypocritical, and cruel. Fundamentalist politics is popular all over the world these days -- witness Algeria, Iran, and Guatemala.

The coach has no experience in politics, but this small issue was not a hindrance to Bud Wilkerson, former Oklahoma University football coach, when he decided to run for a House seat in the 1960's (thankfully he lost). The fact that Bud actually ran is the scary part. And, no doubt, many people would vote for an inexperienced, right wing, fanatical clown like McCartney simply because they recognize his name from ... somewhere.

McCartney and his ilk like us to believe that the problems of poverty, alienation, homelessness, unemployment, global pollution, war, etc. are a result of the breakdown in the "family." Which to their way of thinking means the patriarchal family, ruled by the men. Fools. Republicans, and capitalists generally, may like to pretend that social problems cause economic problems, it's convenient for them to not admit that capitalist relations require human misery. The reality is that economic problems cause social problems.

Most people realize this, and have -- sadly -- given up on the current political system. They no longer believe that politicians are capable of addressing the fundamental problems of humanity. The latest, strongest evidence of this is that the new Republican "majority" that swept into the Congress was the choice of 21% of the voting age population. A Republican Congress may claim to represent the majority, but clearly the majority has no faith in them what so ever.

So, just what would a Sen. McCartney do for the people of Colorado? He would likely oppose any laws, programs, or policies which promote civil rights, gender equality, or workers' rights. He would advocate forced "voluntary" prayer in the public schools, blue laws, the criminalization of abortion, and the elimination of sex education in the public schools, but he would support an environment friendly to the interests of the wealthy few.

Coincidentally, the same week I heard this terrifying news, Denver had its worst air quality of the year -- well below Federal Clean Air standards. One day you couldn't even see the skyscrapers of Denver from a few miles out. Additionally, Colorado has had one of the warmest and driest winters on record -- which usually means more forest fires in the summer. Across much of the country, we are witnessing environmental crises of both local and global proportions.

Would a Sen. McCartney do anything about these problems? Would he do anything about the increasing violence on the streets of Denver and its suburbs (murders are up 13% in Denver for 1994)? Would he do anything to help the lives of ordinary, working Americans? Or would he simply parrot the rising tide of fascist rhetoric that have become the Republican Party platform (like the "family" value of interring poor children in orphanages)?

Will any Republican U.S. Senator ever do anything to help ordinary people, or help heal the planet? Politics is class struggle.

Unless you are rich, things are bad out there in the 1990's. And they are not likely to get any better until people, working people, the majority of this country decides to take control -- the 79%. If America really is a democracy then we should be in control. It won't be easy to get control, though, the current system is based on greed, and perpetuates itself through the class control of finances and thereby government.

Ordinary people don't have a lot of excess money. But we do have numbers, and if we can get it together, we can run this country the way it was supposed to be run -- of the people, by the people, for the people: working people.

(January 1995)

The other night I was sitting outside and there was this cat on the other side of the fence, howling obnoxiously like it was in heat. Only, how could I know if it was really in heat and not lost, or hurt? I like cats, so I am the kind of person who would have these thoughts.

So I called to it in a friendly way. I figured, if it was lost it would just hop the fence, if it was in heat it would shut up, and if it was hurt it would keep crying. I just wanted it to shut up. It did.

I'll bet that cat had no idea how much thought went into my intruding on its night.

Humans are always thinking, that is rational -- cats just aren't. Some people claim humans aren't rational, predictable. You see, we can't organize together if we think we can't trust each other. And (conveniently) the logic of capitalism is that you can't trust everyone else to do his or her bit.

Its like this, if everyone else isn't doing their part for society then each person must be on their own, right? People say this all the time. But why is it that people can't be trusted? Because people really aren't rational? Which is to say, don't behave in the ways some might want them to, or would have predicted.

But people ARE rational; are human and complex. Herein lies the confusion: it is extraordinarily difficult to know all the factors that go into an individual decision to act in any particular way. We have to decide, rationally, how to get that cat to shut up. But occasionally things are more complex, or maybe we are not completely honest -- with even ourselves -- about the factors that motivate us (and some factors are actually physical and thus extremely difficult to be aware of, even with the help of a trained outside observer).

Humans are rational. Even psychotic humans are rational IN their own worlds, which means the world as they perceive it. This is the logical conclusion of the behavioral sciences. Some people benefit from a certain (mis)understanding, so it is convenient to misstate the source of things left unknown. We can't necessarily know everyone's reasons for their decisions to act in their particular ways. But that doesn't mean people aren't rational, and generally predictable with a little understanding.

We recognize human cognition, recognize that we share consciousness with everyone else, and that cats don't. Class society pretends we can't trust each other, predict the behavior of those around us. But we can and do; this is the source of the human bond, the source of society.

In social thought, the philosophy of existentialism (especially as developed by Sartre) and sociology (which was invented by Marx and Engels) develop from this conclusion about society -- as is humanist thought generally. We are all connected; all related together, not just by circumstance, but by our common humanity -- that ability to decide, to judge.

One of the manifestations of this shared bond is the struggle for justice. Being human means being inherently equal, since "human" is the quality of being rational, self aware, conscious. People who are treated -- what we all some how recognize (even if some people choose not to acknowledge) -- as unfairly will inevitable rise up to fight that injustice. We understand this.

The struggle for justice is basic to being human. It is the engine of history. Historically, the most basic injustices are always related to class. These injustices have made certain things possible, and looking back have been inevitable facts of human history. None-the-less, historical struggles have always, eventually, achieved more justice; from feudal to mercantile society, to capitalism, and one day to socialism. Class struggle is history, and as inevitable today -- with our systematic mal-distribution of wealth and power -- as it was in 1776.

Humans are driven, still today, to seek justice. The Big Business media proclaimed the end of class struggle with the end of the Cold War. But nothing has changed, not here, not in most of the world (and where there has been change it has made life worse for most people). The cyclical global contraction in the capitalist economic

cycle is with us as anticipated -- like clockwork every sixth decade. Poverty is increasing, instability is growing. Is it surprising that humans resist, that the Communist Party USA, for example, would be growing (just as it did during the last contraction in the 1930's)?

Some people would have us believe that the problems of capitalist society; like urban decay, crime, poverty, homelessness, despair, violence are due to a lack of faith, or an impoverishment of the human spirit, due to irrationality. Some people would have us believe that we must have injustice, because we humans are -- in one of a myriad of ways -- irrational. These people excuse tolerating injustice on the grounds that some humans seem -- to them -- irrational and thus inferior or unworthy or incapable.

There are all kinds of rationalizations for injustice, which we are especially familiar with in their racist variety. Rationalized injustice is the "Contract ON America." The Contract is a savage offensive in the class struggle aimed at severing the human bond, saying that we shouldn't care for each other. But that which is human in us will resist, and -- assuming the environment can be preserved for us and the cats -- one day overcome.

The end of the Cold War could only have brought an end to class struggle, an end to history, if the radical social change had been here; the class struggle moving forward, once again, from less justice to more.

(February 1995)

Does the State of Colorado have the right to be the Hate State? It depends on whom you ask, but a final answer is near, or at least nearer now that the U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to review Colorado's infamous Amendment 2.

When last we checked our Amendment 2 -- the Colorado Supreme Court deemed an amendment to the Colorado Constitution -- unconstitutional. At issue is civil rights and whether or not some people can discriminate against other people because they don't happen to agree with some aspect of the other people's lifestyle.

We all have a lifestyle; the term is open that way. We all behave in particular ways that have become habit, or make us happy, or we think we ought to, etc. If we do things that hurt other people (or -- especially -- their property, our capitalist legal system takes care of property) the state has an obligation to intervene. This is the basic principle behind laws and jails.

But the question arises, what hurts other people (or their property)? Many things are obvious, some are agreed upon. If you run up and hit someone over the head (or take their wallet), then you have hurt them. That is bad and the community, through the state, has an agreed upon obligation to prevent people from doing this kind of thing (punishment for doing it being a side issue).

Further, if you hurt people severely enough you can actually lose some of your constitutional rights. At issue with Amendment 2 is whether these constitutionally guaranteed rights can be taken away merely because some people disagree with your lifestyle. Amendment 2, if found constitutional, would repeal specific civil rights laws passed by a couple of different Colorado cities. These laws do not grant anyone additional rights, but make explicit the rights we all enjoy (for now).

So why do I bring up the issue of hurting other people? Some people think that they should be able to judge the non-threatening lifestyles of others, that is judge the social behavior of others even when this behavior has absolutely no impact on the judgmental person or anyone else. If one person's lifestyle did cause other people harm then the state would be obliged to take a stand.

The part that I really think is funny is that the people who want to be able to judge everyone else call themselves Christian. Those of you who actually are Christian, or are familiar with the faith, will know that not judging others is a kind of key concept. But the politics of fascism has never worried much about logical or ethical consistency.

The proponents of Amendment 2 claimed certain identifiable groups of people should not be given "special rights." They implied that laws, which specifically mention that it is illegal to discriminate against a particular group of people somehow, give these groups "special rights." These right-wing religious fanatics seem to think that only those people specifically mentioned have these rights. But civil rights are not affirmative action programs. We all have civil rights.

I actually do not believe that the people behind Amendment 2 really think that civil rights and affirmative action are the same thing. Although that was the way the issue was presented in their advertising. The 52% of the voters who passed Amendment 2 likely thought they were saying that we shouldn't have affirmative action programs for everyone who feels a little oppressed (anyone who works for a wage feels at least a little oppressed, so you can see their point).

But that is not what Amendment 2 is really about. The issue is oppression and whether voters can pick out a group of people and say it is okay to violate their civil rights. This is what the religious right is really after. They think they are superior and thus in a position to judge the rest of us and determine for themselves the status of our civil rights.

I suppose it is good and bad that the U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear the case. If the Court rules Amendment 2 unconstitutional, that ruling will destroy attempts by right-wing groups in other states to pass similar legislation. But, on the other hand, the court as currently constituted is not big on civil rights, most of the justices were nominated by Reagan (who didn't know what he was doing most of the time), Bush (who seemed to think that working people are best used for sport like Louis XIV hunting peasants in Mel Brooks' "History of the World, Part I" movie), and Clinton (who can't seem to decide what he believes).

The high court may decide that voters can override basic civil rights protection for minority groups. That is democracy -- in a crude sense. But there is something entirely unethical about a conception of democracy that allows a majority (of voters, not even of people) to choose to oppress a minority. The issue of measuring the will of the majority is just part of the problem, although an important one when the absolute majority has given up on voting as a means of expressing its will.

(March 1995)

We are moving into dangerous territory in this country. The owners of big business and their puppet politicians are waging an all out offensive on working people -- trying to undo the survival safety net that so many struggled so long to construct; i.e. unemployment insurance, welfare, food stamps, social security, and more.

The right wing in this country wants a society in which the state has no role in recognizing the individual's right to a minimum standard of living, let alone civil rights. It is as if they refuse to acknowledge that Community means something more than sharing the same geography. They have their money; secure incomes, business interests and tax write offs. The rest of us are on our own. Capitalism requires human misery, it must have some level of unemployment, some level of poverty, as well as concentrated wealth. In our society, some percentage of people must suffer senselessly.

Civil rights are the vehicle by which we recognize our shared humanity. To lose them is to lose our humanity. Senseless suffering is somehow more easily overlooked if the society has denied our shared humanity -- denied civil rights to any segment of the population.

In Colorado, the right wing calls itself Christian. This is a mockery of everything that Jesus of Nazareth stood and died for. Where is the compassion, the turning of the other cheek? Where is the judge not lest you be judged? Where is the humanity?

If Jesus came back today and saw what some people do in his name he would never stop throwing up (Woody Allen wrote that).

(April, 1995)

The thing that has amazed me most about the poison gas attack in the Tokyo subway is, not that it is an act of the most random type of terrorism, or that it seems to have been perpetrated by a strange religious group, rather, that I have not even read the word "Why" in any of the news reports. Why?

Why would anyone want to spread poison gas in a crowded subway? Why would people who would otherwise claim to be motivated by Buddhist thought cause such senseless suffering? Why? And why does no one ask why?

I remember the news reports the day after the attack, before there were any suspects, the corporate media was interviewing everyone they could find who knew anything about terrorism or chemical warfare. No one had any idea who had done it, but they seemed to agree that it could have been anyone. One "expert" said that it is more difficult to brew beer than produce sarin. I have, personally, brewed beer. While it is not exactly easy -- brewing beer is not all that difficult. If any "nut" (more on this below) with a tub can produce sarin, then maybe we need to get to the bottom of why. Why would anyone spread a lethal poison through a crowded subway? What do they think they could possibly accomplish?

These are the questions that really worry me. Our society treats anything, or anyone that defies immediate explanation as irrational. The corporate media never even asks "why?". They just assume that whoever did it must be "crazy." Clearly, this is absurd, one cannot assume that a large group of people, with complicated technical knowledge, that behaves in destructive ways is simply made up of crazy people. No, they want something, and they thought spreading poison gas would somehow help them in their cause. Why?

What is it about our society that we create groups of people who are capable of committing acts of mass destruction? Why do we have sections of our cities and countries that are not safe for strangers to visit? And, why, as Tracy Chapman put it, is a woman still not safe in her home? There is something clearly very wrong in our global village, our ever-smaller world society. We are in danger of losing what precious little of our humanity that

has survived the 20th century. At home, the U.S. Senate is holding hearings on relaxing gun laws. They respond to people claiming to feel threatened but never ask "Why?".

We live in a violent world -- why? In a world with ample resources, technology, and distribution systems there would seem to be no need for the level of violence we have accepted as "normal." The problem is, of course, that these resources are not distributed anywhere near fairly. So why don't we talk about this? Why don't we talk about injustice, about human suffering? And more importantly what to do about it?

Systematic cruelty in any society will manifest itself in other forms -- street crime, white-collar crime, crimes against nature and humanity, terrorism. Why must we live in a world that requires suffering, that lives on injustice, that is based on the exploitation of human beings?

The sarin attack in Japan should give us all pause. The fact that experts agree that this type of attack could occur anywhere in the world, and that there are a myriad of groups capable of doing it is shocking, terrifying. Something is clearly wrong.

Since no one else will do it, lets ask now: why would anyone want to gas an innocent population? They must want something, not just death. Death is a tool, a means of bringing about something -- presumably change. Death is a tool for other purposes in our society as well. A society in which owners decide that some percentage of workers can be killed so that profit margins will be as high as possible cannot really be shocked when others make the same choices.

I cannot say what kind of change any particular type of terrorist wants, but I am sure someone in the Japanese intelligence services does know. Terror is simply a means of motivating the masses to move. Real change requires the active participation of the majority. Any particular group of terrorists might not want the same kind of change that the masses want -- witness Algeria. But they know that fear is a powerful motivator.

Perhaps, though, if the majority of people in this country and the world did make the kind of change which would move us towards a society in which violence is not the norm, where exploitation is not required, such a change may have the side effect of eliminating the sociological phenomenon of terrorism.

That idea may sound naive at first, but think about this. Crime, all crime, is a sociological phenomenon. We behave in understandable ways; even aberrant behavior is understandable -- largely predictable -- if one takes the time to look at people and their lives (this is what sociology is about). Eliminating crime is simply a matter of removing the motivations for that type of aberrant behavior.

Of course, it is in the interests of the owners of our country to not ask the hard questions. If they did ask the hard questions, and the answers had something to do with radical social change -- change which would decrease profits -- corporations would be negatively effected. It is thus not in the interests of the owners' media to ask why either. It is easier for them if ordinary people just believe that violence is inevitable, an unavoidable characteristic of the human animal. I don't buy it. Do you? Why?

(May 1995)

The other day I was riding my bike past a new subdivision called, "Meadow View." And this got me to thinking about words and the way we use words in our

culture. You see, there was no meadow to view from this development -- the name is just words.

This kind of thing happens all the time. Pick up a package of some sort of "sodium free" food at the store, and guess what -- it has sodium. Sodium free is a government sanctioned advertising slogan, not a statement of truth. We don't have statements of truth anymore. We have come to accept that while the government doesn't exactly lie, it does engage in disinformation, as does the business world generally.

I know this guy who was recently discussing placing an ad to hire a manager, the ad would have read in part, "excellent" salary and benefits. This for a job with one week of vacation, paying less than \$25,000 per year. Excellent? Compared to what, slavery? It is business, not reality. Hate Radio is the same way. But words do not now, nor have they ever had the kind of power that some people attribute to them. People know that they can say what they want because it doesn't matter -- we have become jaded and do not expect statements of truth any longer.

The "Liberal" establishment, following the president's line, is condemning the right wing for its counter-productive and vicious style. And anyone who is familiar with the right wing's dark star -- Rush Limbaugh, for example -- will know that statements of fact are not at all related to what he says. People just talk.

On national TV the president said we should talk down hate speech. With what? He is not exactly a model of truthful speech himself. We have lost our reference points. Words are supposed to refer to something, other than themselves. In our modern capitalist culture we have lost this connection. We live in the age scholars call post-modernism. It is an age marked by this disjunction between words and their meanings. Like Meadow View.

My personal favorite is "Homosexual Nazis." Which is like Jewish Nazis, Communists for Capital Gains Tax Cuts, or Military Intelligence. The president said that we should "call" people on the things they say. So let's do that. What about Vince Foster? Remember him? Close friend of the president, found dead in a park in D.C. in 1993. Turns out that in spite of the National Park Service police, and the president, saying he committed suicide, he was actually murdered. Small detail here, but investigators found no trace of the soil from the park on Mr. Foster's shoes. His body was obviously dumped there. But our authorities have said "suicide" frequently enough that people have given up interest.

Answer this question. If a friend of yours was found dead, the local cops said it was suicide though this was obviously not true, and you happened to be President of the United States, would you have some people looking into this? I'm sure it is just a coincidence that Foster was intimately connected with this whole "Whitewater" real estate scam (well, maybe I'm not sure).

When the president says something on TV, who actually believes him? I know I don't. He pretends to care, but come on. Something important is going on here. If people know that they cannot trust the President of the United States to tell them the truth, does it matter anymore what anyone else says?

We don't have political discussions in this country, not in the corporate media anyway, discussions about the problems we have and why we have them. So people vent their frustrations. Does hate radio, does Rush Limbaugh, serve any other purpose than to

give people a place to vent? God forbid they found a place to organize. The people who talk about organizing working people don't get the kind of attention Rush Limbaugh gets.

Limbaugh makes up a reality which is comfortable for him and advertisers support him, publishers publish him, and the corporate media reports on him. Who discusses the complete dislocation of his ideas from reality? People do, but that's not part of our commercially dominated culture.

Whoever blew up that building in Oklahoma City did not do it because of hate radio, because of words. They did it because of the way they experience the world. True, they probably have some odd notions about why things happen. We have to talk about these things, or they will just get worse -- remember Germany circa 1932?

And the guy the cops arrested may or may not have been involved, but he clearly is not bright enough to have done it alone, and is also clearly the fall guy. Remember Lee Harvey Oswald? It is not about words.

Some very sophisticated people blew up that building, so when the president accepts an explanation that most people recognize as too easy (as in the Foster case), too far from reality, he continues to be part of the problem. When is he going to take responsibility for his words?

Clinton can complain all he likes, but until he is willing to talk about the real problems Americans have, and address some real solutions then those problems -- which form a substantial part of people's experience and therefore their thinking -- will continue. Who is in a position to call the hate mongers on the things they say if the individuals the hate mongers complain the most about tell the truth as infrequently as the hate mongers themselves?

(June 1995)

A local paper in the area in which I live recently had a front page story about some high school graduates securing appointments to the military academies; Annapolis, Air Force, West Point. I hadn't thought about this for some time, but I had my eye on Annapolis once.

Back in high school I was interested in physics and thought that the Navy would offer me an opportunity to finance my education. In our uncivilized country the children of working people do not have ready access to education and therefore must prostitute themselves.

At the time I didn't think of the Academies in these terms. Ironically, in the last decade I have been in the military as an enlisted person, and have found other ways to finance my graduate education (debt, its the American way).

Even to me it seems that those words are a bit bitter. And, I suppose, I am angry, as all working people should be, that students must sell their souls just to get an education. The military is a tremendous source of educational financing in this country and that just doesn't seem right.

I happen to be one of those people who believe that all human beings deserve to be free to live their lives being productive, raising families, exploring the arts, whatever, free from the inherent violence, instability, cruelty, and warmongering of our current economic system. But how do young people do this?

We all have to live in the capitalist economic system until such time as the revolution comes. It seems to me that we ought to do our best to live moral lives in the mean time. I suppose I am still bitter about constantly having to choose between survival and a moral life.

The teenager that I was didn't think much about the purpose of the military in American society. That young person wanted to be a moral person but had not developed much awareness of the world outside his high school walls. I suspect the same is true of the local high school graduates now preparing for the academies.

Something has become remarkably clear to me in the intervening years though, and that is that one cannot work for the military and still live a moral life. The institutions with which one is associated define the moral character of one's life. In the post Cold War world -- especially -- it is not reasonable to hold onto the naive view that the U.S. military has any other goal than to dominate the labor and economic markets of other countries for the sole purpose of making some people increasingly wealthy at the expense of the rest of us.

There was that one guy who tried to be moral as an U.S. Army officer -- he's facing six years in prison for looking into the conditions in a prison facility under his jurisdiction. I am referring to Capt. Larry Rockwood, that commander in Haiti who foolishly confused what President Clinton said with what the military is really about.

So while the corporate press is excited about our local young people having the "honor" of appointments to the U.S. Military Academies, I am not impressed. To me they are very nearly the moral equivalent of the Kappos in the Nazi prison camps -- Jewish individuals who worked for the Nazis to save themselves. Working class youth who sell their souls to the military are doing the same thing, for it is the U.S. Military/Industrial complex which is the real enemy of democracy, as President Eisenhower so eloquently confessed all those years ago.

The tragedy in this issue is that the young people going off to the military have probably never thought about the moral implications. The Army, for example, does not go out of its way to raise these issues -- they just advertise the vocational training. And the newspaper I referred to above would never run a piece questioning the "honor" of an appointment to West Point (for example).

As the quality of life in America continues to deteriorate for the majority we are going to be facing some tough times. This lack of moral depth to our public discussions about issues like the military (let alone the FBI or BATF) will return to haunt us. In fact, the haunting may have already begun; the "militias" have been nurtured by this lack of attention to social issues.

Perhaps it is time that we all take a deep breath and begin to ask the hard questions: What is to be done?

(July 1995)

So, it turns out that Susan Smith really did kill her two young sons. It is amazing what people who fail to appreciate the intrinsic value of human life will do -- to themselves or others. We may never know how many lives were destroyed when Smith

ran her car into that lake; her sons', their father's, her own, grandparents', etc. No matter how many lives she destroyed, at least it is on a small scale.

I wish the same could be said of the actions of another depraved soul: Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole. Last month Sen. Dole said he favored killing a bill introduced by Sen. Tom Harkin that would have made it illegal to import products into the U.S which were manufactured by child labor -- that is produced by workers under the age of 15.

This is the 20th century now, isn't it? I think we can all agree that forcing children under the age of 15 to work in factories is morally abhorrent. Bob Dole wouldn't want his grandchildren working in factories making carpeting. You and I wouldn't want that either. Turns out, Dole -- who in a truly sick twist of fate, is actually running for President -- really doesn't mind if children all over the Third World work in factories.

The Harkin Bill is considered to be dead in the water because people like Dole don't believe we should tamper with the sanctity of the "market." So the estimated 200,000,000 children who work in virtual slavery around the world (according to our own State Department) will continue to slave away. And the people who profit from child labor will continue to profit from it.

But that's not all. Capitalism's friends in Washington also feel that clean water, clean air, and safe food aren't the concern of government; "Let them eat E. coli bacteria," is the rallying cry from Washington these days. Something's happening here, and what is, is becoming terrifyingly clear.

The Republicans have decided that the collective good has no larger interests that supersede the right of capital to do as it pleases. They seem not to believe that living in society means having collective interests. These "conservatives" are trying to eliminating the Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, USDA inspection standards, as well as power for the EPA and OSHA to enforce any laws which might remain after these capitalist lackeys are done making the world safe for profit.

People do die from water born parasites, and they die from unsafe, poorly inspected meat. Back in 1982 there was an outbreak of E. coli that killed four children and made 1,000 more sick in Washington, Oregon, and northern California. In 1993 an outbreak of a parasite called cryptosporidium in the Milwaukee water supply sickened 400,000 people to varying degrees, ten of whom died.

We now know that her stepfather for a number of years, extending even into the early years of her marriage sexually assaulted Susan Smith. A South Carolina jury has decided that she should not be put to death. The irony is that life in prison might be the harsher sentence because she will have to face the horror of that moment of insanity and its consequences for the rest of her life. Sparing her life, ironically, is the leniency shown in the face of the larger circumstances of her life.

But what of Bob Dole? What is his excuse for his anti-social behavior? Where is his remorse? When is the trial? Is there a special hell for people like him?

Does an individual in a position of power, with the influence to change national safety standards, have a moral responsibility for the outcome of his actions? YES! If these changes in legislation do take place then I, for one, believe Bob Dole and company should be tried for Murder, Conspiracy to Commit Murder, Child Abuse, Conspiracy to Commit Child Abuse, and other Crimes Against Humanity depending on the actual death toll.

I actually saw a "Bob Dole for President" bumper sticker on a car in a suburban grocery store parking lot the other day. Did a child molester who felt a kinship with Dole own the car? I didn't have the inclination to hang around the car and ask. I simply cannot imagine the value system of someone who supports that kind of evil, evil on such a wide scale, evil which kills thousands, forces hundreds of millions into slavery, and all just to make a few extra bucks. Dole is willing to DESTROY the lives of HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE and he is not on trial, facing death by lethal injection, he is running for President!

At least Susan Smith recognizes the depravity of her actions and feels remorse.

(August 1995)

Why do so many people have a problem with Dr. Jack Kevorkian? I am not a doctor, and only follow him in the news, but clearly Kevorkian is a hero. Suicide, at least as he supports it, is about human dignity. Why would people have a problem with human dignity?

Kevorkian recently witnessed/assisted with (how can I know?) his 25th suicide (at least that the media is aware of), in Oakland County near Detroit. The medical examiner's office has ruled the death a homicide -- murder. Are they kidding? Who are these people and what makes them so obsessed about controlling people.

Suicide has been viewed as a sin in our religious traditions, and as an emotional problem by psychiatry. Albert Camus, the great French existentialist philosopher, asked why we do not commit suicide. In the face of existential meaninglessness, life has no purpose, and therefore to accept life with all of its suffering is illogical. Suicide is the rational choice for all people.

I'm not saying that I agree with Camus, but I do see his point. Life is not about finding meaning out there. There is no meaning there is only life, and life is what we make of it. Camus' friend Sartre finished the argument by pointing this out. And for the people Kevorkian helps life has become only suffering.

Why do the Oakland County authorities wish to condemn an innocent person to years (or maybe just weeks) of perpetual suffering? Do they also kick dogs and beat children?

Suicide is the ultimate control one can exert over one's life. It is my opinion that religious traditions have banned suicide because they did not want the masses to think that if life got really bad they could get out of their role of producing wealth for the ruling class by killing themselves. After all if you have slaves, and paid good money for them, you wouldn't want them to just off themselves now would you? Think of all the money that would waste.

Marx taught us that religion is the opium of the people, which means that religion gives people a crutch to deal with reality when it is otherwise too painful. Suicide could be an out, but religion teaches that people who commit suicide -- who exercise ultimate control over their own lives -- are damned to hell. Better to take the drug and put up with it, and get back to those fields or that factory and make someone some profit, damnit!

Of course there is another way out as well. Any way out scares the ruling class. They need the oppressed to be docile and cooperative. And actually the other way out, is

the way out for everyone, and it requires a lot of people to act together -- tough thing to organize, but boy can it get results. I am referring, of course, to revolution. Just as suicide is a solitary act of control, revolution is a collective act of control. Both seem to be chosen when all other possibilities are exhausted. Revolution has the advantage of increasing positive experiences, pleasure, while suicide only ends negative experiences, pain.

(September 1995)

Many people come to me and they say, "Hey, how come you are a Communist?" And, I say, "It is a moral imperative." And they say, "Huh?"

Allow me to elucidate with an analogy. I just read a bit about the actor/activist Martin Sheen. As many people are aware, Sheen has been very active lately in progressive causes, saving the environment, workers' rights, demilitarizing the global economy, etc. As it happens, Sheen claims this activism is a result of a rediscovery of his Catholic faith.

So, okay Sheen is a Catholic, and as such he feels an imperative to involve himself in progressive causes. He is just trying to make the world a little bit better place to live, for all of us. We can all understand that, right?

Turns out, the issue is not so clear cut. Religious people, at least self-proclaimed religious people are often involved in issues of public policy. Sometimes they are on the side of good, like Sheen, and sometimes they are on the side of evil, like Pat Robertson. Both men in this example claim to be Christians, and claim that their politics are an outgrowth of that faith.

As a student of religion, even I am hard pressed to figure out exactly what these two have in common that makes them claim a shared faith. One on the right -- on the side of big business and totalitarian government -- the other is on the left -- on the side of social justice, equality, and human progress. Both Christians? I suppose so, but Christianity is a moveable feast. Christianity has, after all, been the stated justification for more death, cruelty, and bloodshed than any other alleged cause in history. Christianity is also the claimed motivator for some of the most kind, and generous people in history.

I, personally, understand the Christianity of people like Sheen, because they are motivated by a genuine concern for humanity. People like Robertson are either just outright evil, or very, very confused. You see, right-wing theology supports right-wing politics. In theology this orientation means "God said!" It means that Truth and Good are handed down from God. In practice, right-wing theology ends up being someone said God said. Left-wing theology, like left politics, means, "people say." Each of us, as conscious beings, living in community, must engage the world as we experience it ("experience" to Christians also includes reading or hearing the Bible).

For me, and I suspect others, what is good is not merely a question of life, and more life. Rather, what is good is that which decreases suffering. Evil is suffering, and that which causes suffering. I am a Communist for this reason. Capitalism requires suffering. It is therefore evil and must be resisted. This is a moral imperative. Some people think we can reform capitalism and change it so that it does not require suffering.

These people are at least well intentioned -- it is just not true that capitalism can be constructed in a way that does not require suffering. Really. Look it up.

This imperative which motivates me is like that faith which motivates Sheen, and the heroic figures who inspire him: Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Cesar Chavez, and Archbishop Oscar Romero. Although it happens to be the case that I do not believe in a god. I believe in people, in human consciousness, the depth and passion of the human spirit. Some people find this strange. But compassion, a strong sense of human community, and the preservation of human dignity also motivate Sheen and company. They also happen to believe that God sent his "Son" to Earth to point this out to us. I just don't believe that we need the pointer -- we know in our hearts that we are all the same, and that we work better when we work together.

Still, people may ask, how do we know what causes suffering? Basically, all one needs to know is the "Golden Rule." We learned it as kids, and it is still the ultimate truth in morality: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. And why? Because this approach to living decreases the level of suffering in the world and is therefore good.

"Conservatives" traditionally cause suffering, they are therefore evil. Destroying workers' rights causes suffering. Supporting death squads all over the world causes suffering. Homophobia, sexism, racism, and class domination all cause suffering.

On the other side, capitalists would claim that former Chilean President Salvador Allende, for example, caused them suffering by introducing literacy programs, free milk programs, and supporting workers rights. You see, capitalists felt impinged upon by Allende and his socialist government because Allende believed that society should make an effort to more evenly distribute wealth and therefore quite obviously decrease suffering. The CIA killed him in 1973 for this belief, as they did Romero in 1980 and countless other moral beacons in modern history.

No matter what capitalist lackeys might say, impinging on business activity does not constitute an evil. This is because that which benefits a small minority at the expense of the majority (as capitalism does generally) does not qualify as good -- it is in fact evil because the accumulation of wealth by a small percentage of people causes suffering; great suffering like poverty, disease, hunger, homelessness, unemployment, crime, etc.

Our culture has become so dominated by commercial interests that our public discussions on morality have been reduced to absurd contradictions -- people actually argue for increased suffering as some sort of good, just read the Contract On America. This makes me sick, as I am sure it does a lot of readers out there. Government regulation of the evil of capitalism is good. Those who say otherwise are simply covering up an attempt to dominate others and profit from their suffering.

(October 1995)

Let's drink to the hard working people,
Let's drink to the lonely of birth.
Raise your glass to the good and the evil,
Let's drink to the Salt of the Earth.
Say a prayer for the common foot soldier,

Spare a pound for his back breaking work,
Say a prayer for his wife and his children.
"Salt of the Earth"

-- The Rolling Stones,

"The whole psychological message you [hard working people] send [with growth limitation measures] is 'We don't want you', and believe it or not, we're pretty sensitive. Most business people here get tired of being told they're the root of all evil."

-- Tom Hoyt, President, McStain Enterprises

I found Mr. Hoyt's comments very interesting (a bit paranoid perhaps, but telling). He was interviewed recently by a local business reporter. Oddly enough, I haven't read anything in the corporate media (I assume Mr. Hoyt doesn't read the alternative press or listen to community radio) blaming corporate America for all the evils in the world.

But then again, I haven't kept up my subscription to the Wall Street Journal. They say the business press is always honest -- where the popular media just lies I guess -- because money is at stake. Maybe the Wall Street Journal finally admitted that capitalism is a horrible, brutal, ugly, violent, and cruel moment in history whose time has come. And poor Mr. Hoyt is feeling guilty.

I doubt it. Perhaps, Mr. Hoyt has been listening to the Rolling Stones and has taken their message to heart. "Raise your glass to the good and the evil." But which is which? Where is the source of good in our world? And of evil?

"The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for He has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty for captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favor."

-- Luke 4:18-19

On that subject, the recently elected conservative majority in Congress has decided to allocate \$1.2 billion in tax breaks for oil producers' "intangible expenses." These self proclaimed "good Christians" have graciously decided to pay for this and other tax subsidies for the rich by eliminating a \$1.6 billion heating fuel subsidy for hard working people. "Say a prayer for the common foot soldier [this winter]. Say a prayer for his wife and his children."

There is a new level of class struggle in this nation and in the world. And sadly enough, the loudest voices calling themselves "Christian" have taken a stand with and for the wealthy, for private profit and property rights. I don't know about you but I have to agree with George Carlin that "I am sick and tired of these *&%@ing church people." Where is the true source of evil in this land? How about the Christian Coalition?

As Father Juan Luis Segundo, of Uruguay, put it, "They [fundamentalists] muzzle the word of God by try to make one particular portion of scripture the word of God not only for certain particular moments and situations but also for all situations and moments." Which is true. Have you ever heard a fundamentalist quoting Leviticus 25:23?

"The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is mine: for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me."

Our great religious traditions have always placed moral superiority with the lonely of birth, with the common foot soldiers, with the salt of the Earth, the working class. Jesus came to bring good news to the poor, not to the rich. In the Bible there are constant references to the "poor and oppressed." Ever notice how you never read or hear the phrase "wealthy and oppressed"? It's an oxymoron.

The wealthy are by definition the oppressors. From whence does wealth arise if not through the oppression of others? Isn't this the implicit message of religion? I know that it is exactly what people like Karl Marx have been saying about capitalism in particular for a hundred and fifty years -- wealth is the labor value of others taken from them by violence or the threat of violence.

Who is the root of all evil, then, if it is not Tom Hoyt and company? I'm sure Mr. Hoyt would have us blame working people themselves. He probably voted for a Republican who says such things. After all, poor people just need to get up off their lazy butts, right? The fact that capitalism requires unemployment, that the capitalist class' functionaries at the Federal Reserve Board have decided that 6% unemployment is "normal" is completely unconnected to the fact that thousands and thousands of people don't have jobs, right? Working people are poor because they are lazy, or uneducated, or "below the Bell Curve," not because capitalism requires unemployment, requires misery, poverty, injustice.... Right? Capitalism is just evil.

An ordinary man, a common foot soldier, once went to Honduras to help people. He was priest named James Carney. Along his sojourn with God and the people of Honduras he took the name Padre Guadalupe, and he said: "To Be a Christian is To Be a Revolutionary." He is dead now. The CIA trained Honduran Special Forces tortured and murdered him in 1983.

Before that, in 1968 the Second Council of Latin American Bishops meeting in Medellin, Columbia said: "When a system ceases to promote the common good and instead favors special interests, the church must not only denounce the injustice but also break with the evil system." That is the challenge to all who would call themselves human, let alone Christian.

Berke Breathed put it this way (pretend you're reading the comic strip "Bloom County"):

Bill the Cat (with Donald Trump's brain): My God... This is such a quality country.

Ronald Ann (age 6): Whaddya mean Mr. Trump?

Trump: My Palm Beach cottage has 118 rooms. How many rooms does your cottage have?

Ronald Ann: One. But we have nine beds! Reynelda here [her doll] sleeps in a soup box.

Trump: I have a \$100 million boat. Do you have a boat?

Ronald Ann: When the plumbing breaks our sofa floats!

Trump: I have a dream. A dream that one day I might get six points on margin for the Eiffel Tower deal. What do you dream about?

Ronald Ann: Dinner.

Trump: And imagine, in this quality nation, folks like you haven't strung folks like me up by their intestines!

Reynelda: ... Yet.

(November 1995)

"Another general feature [of bourgeois revolutions, as in America, France, and England] was that the new propertied [capitalist] class coming to the front, being able to gather support from the [working] masses, could pose as, and even deem itself for the time being, the representative of the whole People against the old [feudal] order."

--V. G. Kiernan, 1983

We like to think, in this country, that the American Revolution of 1776 was for all the people. In that effort, all Americans were guaranteed certain rights, among these life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Which is all well and good, but hardly meaningful in practice. Recently, people have been talking about the new statistics on crime and punishment. They say that one third of all black men are in jail, prison, or on parole. They say that one million Americans are in prison today. Our only high growth industry is prisons. Bank robberies are on the rise (in Colorado alone we have had double the usual this year). And heroin use is way up all over the country.

The gap between rich and poor is growing like an East Coast landfill, with no end in sight. They say that the wealthiest 1% of Americans control 40% of our national wealth, and the wealthiest 10% control 90% of the wealth. And the response from the government "of the people, by the people, and for the people"? Let them eat cake! No, actually the Republicans are saying: Let them starve, unemployed, freezing to death in a polluted stink hole! The Republicans, or "Newtzis" as columnist Molly Ivins calls them, are less sarcastic than Marie Antoinette. Irony is lost on their limited intellects.

You see, we don't yet have government "of the people," because we still have rich and poor, owners and workers. As long as that is true we will have a government of wealth, by wealth, and for wealth. This truism has certain repercussions that are unavoidable in the postmodern world. Ivins is hinting at the real problem -- Newtzism.

In Germany in the 1930's there was tremendous poverty, inflation, suffering. And people were beginning to figure that what they really needed was a change, a change like Russia made just a little over a decade earlier. But that kind of change, while benefiting the majority, does so at the cost of the wealth and power of the minority -- the 1%. Even in Germany, they had all the wealth they needed for everyone to live well, but it was concentrated in too few hands. Just as it was in France a century before, or in America today.

Rich people in Germany, America, England, and other places saw what was happening in 1933. From their point of view, there is at least one small comfort in political instability in modern nation states -- the political struggle is complex and it is possible to divert people's attention away from the real causes of their misery to false causes, to scapegoats. And so the ruling classes of Europe and America, for a time, pumped money into the Nazi political machine. In America today, just as in Germany then, some people blame Jews, other foreigners, and some even blame the government. This last is the most interesting; the others are tired and well known. It is embarrassing that people still fall for them, but not mysterious. The mysterious one is the new anti-government trend on the right.

Sure big government is inefficient; it is a compromise between the people and big business. But at least it is inefficient at providing for people's survival, if not comfort. The anti-government movement sees in this the problem. Now I am sure that the rank and file militia types don't see that reducing the scope of government is a principle aim of the capitalist class. They, the rich, have for over sixty years now, compromised the "freedom" of capital to exploit resources and labor. They are emboldened of late, and want to dismantle the EPA, OSHA, wetlands protection, clean air and water legislation, labor rights laws, and taxes -- on their capital gains.

The interests of working people and small business owners are not served by reducing the scope of government, gutting laws that protect us all, we -- after all -- cannot afford to have air filter systems installed in our homes like the wealthy in Mexico City. We cannot afford to buy bottled water for all of our water uses. We will be condemned to live with environmental degradation, the pollution, and the ugliness that will inevitably accompany the Newtzis rise to power.

Like their counterparts in Germany 60 years ago the Newtzis feign an appeal to the masses -- getting big government off our backs. But the "our" in "our backs" refers not to working people, but to the rich. The return to "Constitutionality," to a system of laws based only on guarantees of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are all for the benefit of capital not for labor. One cannot pursue happiness, or much of anything, if all of one's time is taken up pursuing survival -- the Newtzis know this.

Our Constitution, beautiful though it may be, is incomplete because it assumes the ability to survive. Its framers were, for the most part, members of the developing capitalist class. Today we say that they envisioned a nation of people working for themselves -- but this is hardly true. They envisioned a nation of small and medium land and slave owners hiring out the poor and living free from the constraints of feudalism, free of the demands of the monarchy. To them, as to the wealthy today, survival is not an issue. In point of fact, survival is the issue that most occupies working people today. We can go along with the right wing and free capitalists from social responsibility, or we can take matters into our own hands.

We have before us two paths, as in Weimar Germany. The left path, which is the way of more democracy, shared wealth and power, socialism; and the right path, the way of totalitarian government and a wide disparity of wealth and power, Newtzism. For all their talk of reducing government, there is one part that the Newtzis will only increase, and that is the iron fist; the military and police. We can see that already from the budget debates. We live in a world in which our nation is not threatened and yet the Newtzis are still increasing the War budget. And what did the Nazis do with their increased war budget, their discontented masses, scapegoating, and their slick propaganda machinery? Forty million people died. Do the lessons of history really require repetition before realization?

(December 1995)

Ever noticed how politicians don't talk about ideology, about ideas, anymore? Even in politics we see the elevation of form over content -- the defining characteristic of the culture we call Postmodernism.

Postmodernism is the name of the current cultural period. Modernism was the name of the cultural period that began with the beginning of capitalism. In the 18th and 19th centuries society moved from being mostly agricultural and communal, if feudal, to manufacturing based and more isolated. Family came to mean immediate family, nuclear family. Family used to mean what we now call clan. At that time, pre-capitalism, the glue that held society together was religion.

With the advent of manufacturing and the rise in power of the capitalist class over the monarchies came new forms of culture, new ways of relating to each other. Part of this was a decline in the role and power of religion. In the new culture of Modernism the suddenly insular nuclear family and public schools came to have the role of social glue. That was the 19th century. But something changed around the turn of the century. We now live in the age of Late Capitalism, some call it Imperialism. The family unit is disintegrating under the stresses of economic collapse. The labor force is -- as the say -- disciplined. It has become "normal" for people to move away from family and friends to find jobs, and in the course of their lives do this over and over.

At one time family support helped people survive the barbarism of Early Capitalism. But today the schools are in disarray; the family has succumbed to the "discipline of the labor market." This is the cultural age of Postmodernism. In Postmodern society the disjunction people feel -- that discipline -- manifests itself culturally in a disjunction between form and content, between symbol and meaning. Often, today symbols don't mean anything at all. Commercial art especially is like this: images without meaning, form without content. Postmodernism is the elevation of beauty over truth, form over content, image over meaning.

Sure, religion remains, and we still have families and schools. But they have lost their power to be the social glue. The schools and families are fragmented by the effects of the economy, the effects of capitalist imperialism. This is the age in which people just give up and go shopping.

In the late 1990's we can even go shopping for a President; a Postmodern president that has all the form, the appearance, of a president without any of the content, the ideas or character. Is it any wonder that 60% of the population doesn't even vote anymore? We can choose between -- maybe -- three candidates who all look the same, wear the same suits, hang out with the same rich, white, men who own American business. Sure the Republicans are more inclined to fascism, but the Democrats just want to put a velvet glove on it.

We have lost our soul. But we won't find it in religion, or in the family anymore. The world has changed. This is where the right wing shows its colors. People can complain about the decline of the family, or the decline of religion. It will do no good. You cannot recreate a cultural age that has passed. Economies create cultures, and the economy that encouraged the rise of the nuclear family has passed. Human relationships continue, but all relations must exist in the real world with all its "discipline."

We have lost our soul. But it was never in religion. Organized religion has always supported domination and injustice, that is the history of religion and it is undeniable. The Christian Coalition can claim that it wants to rebuild the family, infuse religious values into society -- but it is hollow. All they can create are images of values or of families. Underneath the images, as the images do not mean anything beyond

themselves, is fascism: central control of the state with the sole purpose of maintaining an ever increasingly unequal distribution of wealth.

The rock band "Timbuck Three" has a line in one of their songs that goes like this; "Presidential elections are planned distractions." When we look around America we see great uncertainty, much pain, and a completely unacceptable amount of suffering. People need distractions. Or, more properly we might say that the ruling class needs ways of keeping people distracted from demanding justice. "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain," the reality masked by the image.

Any society that has such an unequal distribution of wealth and power must take steps to keep the majority of people from acting on the principle that they deserve more; more food, clean water, safe jobs, jobs at all, medical care, housing, all of the things people need to survive. When society takes wealth from people through the exploitation of their labor and fails to provide for them there is the potential for revolution.

The distractions offered by Postmodern society only delay justice, they cannot prevent it. "The Family," which is the say the patriarchal family unit, will not survive Imperialism and its culture that we call Postmodernism. The market is too cruel to allow the family to live on. The solution is not to pretend we can go back to an earlier age, as the religious right would have us do, but to eliminate the barbarism that destroys families in the first place. To survive and thrive we must take the next step and create the conditions for a truly human society.

"The Family" is not even the issue; the issue is the economy.

(mid-December 1995)

"The specter of the Soviet Threat is, of course, nothing new. Since the beginnings of the Cold War, the American public has been barraged with ominous scenarios involving 'bomber gaps,' missile gaps,' and now a 'throw-weight gap,' a 'civil defense gap,' and a 'counter force gap.' In the past, these fearsome phenomena -- all of them gravely pronounced by government-sponsored, top-secret, blue-ribbon panels composed of eminent public figures -- have proved highly exaggerated, sometimes downright false." -- Dubious Specter: A Skeptical Look at the Soviet Nuclear Threat, 1980, by Fred .M. Kaplan.

So the Communists are coming back. All over the former "Soviet bloc" the people are voting for Communists in local, regional, and national elections. Most recently, Communists have won elections in Poland, and most significantly, in Russia. It is still difficult for me to talk about "Russia," I grew up when there was a Soviet Union with its capital in Moscow, and in those days the individual republics were not much of an issue.

In the old days, the Soviet Union was a strong country, capable of defending itself from the threat of American Imperialism. The people in and around the Soviet Union had a reasonably high standard of living, not with the glitz we have, but comfortable. People could walk outside alone without worrying about being shot, mugged, or run down, they had health care, about the best education system in the world, secure jobs, retirements,

vacations, housing, gender equality, sports and the arts. Life was good, maybe not perfect, but good.

In the old days, the hundreds of ethnic groups in the Union got along, they worked together and everyone shared what the nation produced. We heard a lot of stories here about life there, but we now know that most of those stories have proved highly exaggerated and sometimes downright false.

To the casual observer this turn of events might seem confusing. Why would any people of the former Soviet Union vote out the "democrats" in favor of the Communists? Well, as it happens, the "democrats" aren't. They are capitalists, hardly democrats -- that these concepts have been mistakenly linked in the American imagination is no accident, but it is none-the-less downright false.

Because of its reliance on markets, there is an inherent sense of decentralized power in capitalism, but it is an illusion. In the real world, the concentration of wealth that necessarily accompanies capitalism creates a wide disparity of power in society -- the dictatorship of capital. Capitalism is antithetical to democracy. We all know this, look around our country. Who controls the government? The wealthy, of course.

There is no mystery to what is happening in the former Soviet Bloc, the people have discovered that an economic system based on private accumulation does nothing good for the society as a whole, and in fact, has amazing costs. It should be dropped like a hot potato. It was inevitable, just as it is inevitable that the Communists will learn valuable lessons about what people want and expect from their society. No people who have tasted socialism, will return for very long to the misery, crime, and injustice of capitalism. This is not a bad thing. Sure, some people will lose their ability to profit from the Russian people, but, that which helps the workers of one country helps us all.

The real danger to all of us, to people and democracy, is the potential actions of the intelligence services of capitalist governments to undermine the democratic expressions of the Russian people. It happens all the time.

Here's a sample from the dozens of examples: in 1951 the CIA bought the Italian elections to prevent socialists from winning. In 1954 the U.S. Marines invaded Guatemala to remove the democratically elected socialist President. In 1973 the CIA organized and financed a fascist coup in Chile to remove the democratically elected socialist President. During the 1970's and 80's The CIA recruited, organized, and financed right-wing armies to remove democratically elected socialist presidents in Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and Angola.

The Russians are figuring things out for themselves quite predictably. No worries there, the real question is how long until we figure things out for ourselves here?

"The aim [of the Contract On America] is to demolish branches of the government that serve (however imperfectly) the interests of poor and working people while expanding and emboldening the police and military branches." (From a Democratic Socialists of America pamphlet, 1995).

Democracy is a beautiful thing, and someday we will even have it here.

(January 1996)

"It is true that the potential subject of the class struggle is the class of wage laborers as a whole, but the real subject is the organized community of the politically active, the party of class conscious workers. Its task is to develop class consciousness and inject it into the working class, to manifest the theoretical principles and perspectives of the class struggle, and to prepare and carry out the actions required by the class struggle."

-- H.H. Holz, 1990

A few weeks ago I was listening to this radio talk show on KGNU (88.5 FM), the local community radio station. The guests in the studio were staff members of an outfit called the Rocky Mountain Peace Center in Boulder, Colorado. The Peace Center was founded at the height of the Cold War by citizens who were concerned that their government was going to blow us all up. In the 1970's this was a real issue, especially in Boulder, being as it is only eight miles from the former site of a nuclear weapons factory. And the Peace Center has by and larger done good work ever since.

The folks at the Peace Center are motivated by pacifist, mostly religious, convictions. Which is not a bad thing at all, they are fond of Mahatma Gandhi, and believe very strongly in the principles of non-violence. A lot of folks in the Boulder area have supported the Peace Center over the years in its work to infuse the values and principles of non-violence into the local community and beyond.

But lately, since the end of the Cold War really, there has been a great deal of hand wringing by people around the Peace Center. The Cold War is over, Rocky Flats has stopped producing plutonium triggers, but things haven't gotten any better. The world is, if anything, even more violent today, even if the threat isn't global and catastrophic, it is pervasive and haunting. But what is to be done? This was the subject of the radio show I was listening to.

The question is kind of loaded because of the nature of the Peace Center. It is a tax-exempt, non-profit organization. You see its mission was believed to be non-partisan, everybody would have died in a nuclear war. The Peace Center has always been tax-exempt because it does the kind of work the government considers charity. So when the question of what is to be done is asked, it is asked in this context that believes itself to be non-partisan. It must be non-partisan, for the Peace Center surely could not survive the added expense of a tax burden.

In spite of this, somewhere along the line the folks at the peace Center got a hold of the concept of justice being significant to peace. Which is a concept I agree with -- there can be no peace outside of justice. This is simply true and often noted. Lenin said it, Gandhi said it, King said it, people say it all the time. And a great many people all over the world work every day for justice, just so we can have peace. So the Rocky Mountain Peace Center formally is an advocate for justice in American society and beyond.

"Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course, for humankind has not created a 'third' ideology, and moreover, in a society torn by class antagonism there can never be a non-class or an above class ideology." -- V.I. Lenin, 1902

So, what does it mean to be a non-partisan advocate for justice? Gandhi said that you have to be willing to pay the ultimate price for non-violence, for justice, for peace.

Peace cannot be, is not, a non-partisan activity. That error is the same one we find in Gorbachev's thinking -- in reality, capitalists do not share values with the working class, especially peace and justice. These concepts are inimical to capitalists, these ideas are revolutionary.

"I must confess that I do not draw a sharp line or any distinction between economics and ethics. Economics that hurt the moral wellbeing of an individual or a nation are immoral and, therefore, sinful. Thus, the economics that permit one country [or person] to prey upon another are immoral." -- M.K. Gandhi, 1921

The Peace Center as I noted is tax-exempt, the government (our capitalist government) views the activities of the Peace Center as non-threatening, non-partisan. If the government of the ruling class views the activities of the Rocky Mountain Peace Center as non-threatening, then what good are they? You have to take sides. To be an advocate of justice, means to take a stand, to be partisan on the side of the oppressed, the side of the working class.

It was at this point in the conversation on the radio that things got weird. One staff member, who works with political prisoners and prisoners' rights, actually said that she does not urge people to vote. She does not view voting, voter registration, or political action to be tools, let alone necessary tools, for achieving justice or peace.

Suddenly, I realized that I didn't know how to talk with these people. I could not think of any response. The idea that any progressive person would not be involved in politics or see the significance of political action in the lives of ordinary people, let alone the fact that the only hope we have for a peaceful transition to a more just society is through electoral politics, was beyond me. What could I say?

I have always respected the work of the Peace Center, I do believe that they are good people, but what are they thinking? I, too, have studied Gandhi, and I know where I agree with him and where I disagree (e.g. birth control) -- and why -- but on the issue of action, of taking sides, of being willing to pay the price that comes with pursuing justice, peace, and truth I stand with Gandhi. I hadn't thought about it before, but these people I heard on the radio were making a mockery of everything that Gandhi said and did. This was a hard realization for me, it made me feel a little alone, because I had always thought of the Peace Center as being part of my community, or maybe I should say, I thought of me as being part of their community.

Suddenly, all of that was gone. There really is no point to the activity of the Rocky Mountain Peace Center in the post Cold War world. I am sorry that I came to that conclusion, I started this column trying to be more upbeat. Recently, my wife told me that I'm not constructive enough of the time in my writing. I was going to write a column about the importance of voting, of getting out and getting everyone you can find to register to vote.

Our system may be perverted by money, but the mechanisms are there for real democracy, real power by the people -- if we can get more than 40% of the population to vote. I realize this is an uphill battle, people are cynical now, and I had hoped that when I made this appeal it would seem obvious to many people, especially the people that I think of (or at least thought of) as being part of my community -- the organized community of politically active working people.

So in the spirit of being constructive: if you are not registered to vote, get registered! If you are, see if you can get 10 people who aren't now to register before November. And remember, the people and planet that you save just might be your own!

(February 1996)

Okay, I think I have had just about enough of these evil drug war hypocrites. Why do we have a War on Americans (and Drugs)? To keep the citizenry in jail and petrochemical profits up! Anyone who says anything else is just lying, probably because they get paid to. I have noticed that the most fanatical defenders of the War on Americans (and Drugs) are people who are paid to say the things they do. Trustworthy sources? I think not.

The issue that especially vexes me is industrial hemp. Hemp is the name for a category of plants which includes the infamous marijuana -- destroyer of lives and moral fiber (at least in some people's dream world). In reality hemp and marijuana are relatively harmless plants, one of which has a mild psychedelic effect on humans and other carbon based life forms. If you want to talk about dangerous chemicals, tobacco and alcohol are the real killers. I'll bet the War on Americans (and Drugs) fanatics proselytize in favor of locking everyone up and then go home each day and drink themselves into a stupor to try and block out the guilt. The War on Americans (and Drugs) keeps them in whiskey and cigarettes, even if it ruins millions and millions of other lives.

But let's talk about hemp. Hemp has a glorious history and has been a part of winning every war this country has won, from the Revolution forward. It is a miracle plant that can be used in more ways than any other plant. You can make fabrics, rope, food, oils, plastics, paper, etc. It is more nutritious than soy and grows ten times faster than wood. Why would anyone think it should be criminal to grow and process?

The usual argument has to do with the War on Americans (and Drugs), which as we all know is hypocritical at best. The real reason is that hemp is a direct challenge to the petrochemical and paper industries. Almost anything that can be made with petroleum or paper can be made more efficiently, cheaper, and environmentally friendly with hemp. Herein lies the rub, if hemp were legal it would really cut into the Dow Chemical people's profits. And we can't have that now can we?

And when did hemp become illegal? Just about the same time the petrochemical industry was setting its sights on the big time. Coincidence? Sure, and the CIA doesn't really control the global narcotics trade either.

Which brings us to profits. The illegal drug business provides very well for certain sectors of the population. Oddly enough, many of these sectors are related in some way to American foreign policy -- "propping up the governments of Columbia and Peru" (you've heard the song). It may have once been possible to live in a fantasy world in which drug profits didn't finance covert wars, but not after the Iran-Contra scandal. The War on Americans (and Drugs) provides for a great deal of soft money, money that is difficult to track and frees the intelligence services to finance mercenaries, secret wars, torture, rape, and all the other fun things they do in our name around the world. Heaven forbid if we decriminalized drugs and cut out their funding.

Then there are the street criminals who deal in drugs. Pot dealers are not crack pushers. But the illegality of both contribute to their being lumped together. The illegality also contributes to turf wars, gang violence, hidden addictions, and a great deal of death and misery. Why is it that the War on Americans (and Drugs) fanatics don't care about the innocent children who get caught in the cross fire during gang turf wars? They get freaked out beyond belief about people smoking a couple of joints, but innocent children dying in the streets seems to be acceptable to these people. The War on Americans (and Drugs) is evil, and so are those who support and profit from it.

What about cops? How many police officers, just doing their job, die each year over a few joints or a gram of cocaine? How many heroin addicts refuse treatment for fear of being turned in and end up choosing death over prison? How many naive kids experimenting with a little pot get busted, only to spend years in prison where the only useful skill they can possibly learn is harder core crime? How many innocent children die in the crossfire? All of this in the name of keeping our streets safe? It is a farce, the purpose of the War on Americans (and Drugs) is not to keep people off drugs but to make prisoners of us all. Either in the literal sense of people busted for having a joint in their pocket, or figuratively when we are afraid to leave our homes and walk our streets.

We have the highest incarceration rate in the world. The percentage of our citizens in prison is double the highest rate anywhere else in the world, a full 60% of whom are there for minor drug crimes. Why? The War on Americans (and Drugs) keeps an ever increasing number of us in jail. And at what cost? It costs at least \$20,000 per year to house a prisoner. Our government is not willing to fund housing programs, education programs, drug rehab programs, youth activity programs, job training programs, welfare, medicare, environmental protection, but they will spend millions and millions of our dollars to keep more and more of us in prison.

There is a sickness which has taken over this country and that sickness is the War on Americans (and Drugs). We don't need more prisons, we need drug rehab programs, job training, job creation. Why do people do drugs? Well, they do them because we are human. People sometimes just choose to do things which are bad for them -- like skydiving, or eating fatty desserts, smoking cigarettes, drinking. We can't stop this, so what should we do? Minimize the danger or exaggerate it by introducing mystique for the youth and the criminal element to supply it? The War on Americans (and Drugs) is just plain stupid, and would be laughable if it didn't destroy so many thousands of lives each year -- cops' lives, street hustlers' lives, junkies' lives, and innocent children's lives. And when you factor in the environmental degradation that comes with an unnecessary petrochemical industry it is clear that the War on Americans (and Drugs) is going to cost us our planet as well.

Enough is enough, it is time to take back our country!

- I. Immediately legalize industrial hemp farming, and switch all government subsidies from tobacco to hemp. Outlaw advertising for alcohol/tobacco/drugs.
- II. Legalize all hemp products. Eliminate DEA and ATF, locate enforcement of alcohol/tobacco/drug laws under Secretary for Health and Human Services, move firearms enforcement to FBI. Eliminate CIA, DIA, and NSA. Amnesty for all persons convicted of possession or cultivation crimes.
- III. Legalize other controlled substances gradually, with increased education, treatment, and amnesty programs.

(March 1996)

I was talking the other day with a friend of a friend who is becoming a professional photographer. We were talking about the new digital technology coming out now. Did you know that anyone with two grand can just go down to the local camera store and buy a digital camera? These cameras take a picture and record the image digitally on compact disk or other such media.

This friend was expressing some uncertainty about the future because digital technology is undermining the assumed authenticity of photography -- any image you see today in newspapers, magazines, even TV could have been created to meet the needs of the producer, rather than being a reflection of reality. This would-be photographer wants to work in the fashion industry, and in fashion photography it is already true that images no longer are based on reality, only imagination. It used to be that the fashion industry had to find women who fit their unique ideas of the human form, but now they can just make up their own digitally. Where has truth gone?

I realize that photography has always been suspicious in terms of truth issues. It has always been possible to manipulate images to produce a desired effect. But it was usually possible for an experienced eye to tell the difference, often even an unexperienced eye could do it. But today, there is no way to know for sure if the image one sees on the news, or in the magazines is real or not.

As art, the issue is not as significant, because art is imaginative by nature. The issue becomes more disturbing in the area of news. But photography is not our only problem area with truth these days. We live in the age of Postmodernism. In our culture, forms, images, and sound bites have become more important than content. Take Bruce Springsteen's song "Born in the USA." The song is a radical critique of Imperialism, yet Ronald Reagan was able to use it in his 1984 presidential campaign. Form over content, image over truth.

This problem with truth is wide spread too. According to a recent book, Rush Limbaugh's Reign of Error, Limbaugh seems to just make up anything he likes to support his cruel view of the world. Is there a principle here that I am missing -- where is this man's integrity? And on the subject of integrity, it turns out, according to another new book, Senator for Sale, that President-wannabe Bob Dole will support just about any legislation, provided one gives him and his campaign committee enough money. Where is this man's integrity?

You see, the new technology in photography just highlights this larger issue. But why do we have such a problem with truth and integrity these days? The usual answer is that in Postmodernism we have lost our reference points, standards. But what does that really mean?

Try this out: the ruling class denies class struggle, denies that the interests of working people and owners are different, usually completely opposed. Right? "Time" magazine would never acknowledge this reality. This state of affairs dates back to the early 1800's when the ruling class claimed that bourgeois revolutions represented workers as much as owners against the aristocracy. The ruling class adopted a new language, or style of language, to keep these waters muddied. The kings never pretended that they

were the same as the peasants -- that their interests were the same. But capitalists do make these claims, at least in public. In private they still believe themselves to be superior and thus believe that the poverty and misery which accompany capitalism are not significant. Us (working people) is not them (multi-millionaires).

For two hundred years now the media and politicians have talked about capitalist class interests and ideas as if they represent all of humanity. What this means is that when most politicians or the commercial media use the words "our," "we," "America," etc., they really mean "we rich people," usually rich, white, male people. According to statistics recently published by the "New York Times," less than 5% of the households in America make over \$100,000 per year, but how much of the public policy discussions, let alone advertising, assume this small group of people to be the standard, the reference point? Who is Bob Dole's constituency? The less than 5%, or more likely the less than 0.5% who can contribute significant sums to his pocket, or the rest of us who can't?

So when Bob Dole, Bill Clinton, or any other capitalist politician talks about right and wrong, sound fiscal policy and disaster, s/he is talking to and for a particular, small group of people, and not to us working stiffs. The things they say are a lie when presented to the public at large, because the issues that are true and important to capitalists are the opposite of what is true and important to the rest of us, yet in our culture capitalist ideologues still use words which imply they are speaking to and for all of America. Where has truth gone?

This state of affairs -- Postmodernism and its accompanying political discourse -- have so jaded us that we no longer even expect truth from politicians, the media, etc. Limbaugh can lie all he wants, just make up a reality which is comfortable for his advertisers, because we don't demand truth or integrity any longer, and in fact we have even lost the tools to distinguish truth from falsity in the blur of sound bits and images. Not everyone listening to Limbaugh would recognize when he is making stuff up, someone had to research it, look things up, check statistics, and then discover that the truth is not that which Limbaugh speaks. It took a lot of work -- Limbaugh isn't going to tell you he is lying, and his advertisers certainly won't publicize a book which documents it.

In the end, art is still just art. Regardless of the technology good art reflects reality, bad art covers it up. Oliver Stone may get criticized for his art, but the reality he reflects is true, it just doesn't fit the fiction of reality the ruling class chooses to portray. The issue is, and has always been, the integrity of the artist, journalist or politician. That something as basic as a photograph has now lost its assumed truth value changes the world in that news must now, unarguably, be viewed with a suspicious eye. Technology has now made obvious what was always true ideologically, that is to say that news has always been suspicious, we just used to pretend that editors and journalists were objective.

No human being is objective, the real issue is integrity.

(April 1996)

Is the so-called War on Drugs a failure? It depends on who you ask. Some people would say that it has succeeded in stopping some drugs and is therefore a success.

However, more and more people are pointing out that drug use and violence in this country have both increased as the budget for the so-called War on Drugs increases.

If the purpose of the so-called War on Drugs is to stop the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, and use of currently illegal drugs then, yes, it has been a monstrous, cruel, and embarrassing failure! This observation is currently being made in wider and wider circles, from publications as diverse as the Communist Party USA's **People's Weekly World** to the right-wing pseudo-intellectual journal **National Review** (hard to believe we agree on anything), and everywhere in between.

All this begs the question then, why do we have a so-called War on Drugs if it is such an inhuman, expensive, and abysmally unsuccessful program? Are the president and the rest of the people in government really that stupid? Do they go around spending billions and billions of dollars because they don't know what their doing? Is the government really run by incompetents?

At this point, some people would be saying, "Of course they're incompetent, look around you!" And that logic is persuasive to some people. After all the country is falling apart and the government's only response is to cut aid to the poor and lock up more and more people. But I, personally, don't think that Bill Clinton and company are stupid. A little foolish because of arrogance, maybe. They certainly are cruel and uncaring. And some of them are down right evil -- but not stupid.

What if we just supposed that the purpose of the so-called War on Drugs was to keep drug profits high for the people who run Columbia and Peru, to help finance covert operations by the CIA, to artificially support the petrochemical and paper industries by outlawing viable natural alternatives like hemp, and to lock up untold hundreds of thousands of otherwise ordinary citizens most of whom happen to be black and/or poor? If these were the purposes of the so-called War on Drugs then we would all have to concede that it has been a triumphant success. Drug money does help prop up Colombia, drug money is used by the CIA to help finance covert -- most people would simply say immoral -- wars against democracy and people around the world, Dow Chemical is secure in the knowledge that hemp is still illegal to cultivate, and we did recently pass the 1.1 million Americans in prison milestone.

Perhaps the so-called War on Drugs is really a humongous success and that is why the government keeps extending it? They aren't stupid they are just lying about their purposes. You see, a lot of people have this view that if things go wrong, at least wrong vis-a-vis the official plan, that it is because of an accident or stupidity. Like when Iraq invaded Kuwait after the US Ambassador to Iraq, one April Glaspie, acting on instructions from the State Department led Saddam Hussein to believe that the US would remain neutral if Iraq were to invade Kuwait. Accident or set-up? I know people who argue that it was an accident, that Glaspie is incompetent. Maybe, but no.

The Accidental Theory of History, as I like to call it, is very popular in this country. It is easier for people to think that Clinton is just foolish for continuing the so-called War on Drugs rather than admit to themselves that the whole thing is a cheap rationalization for locking up the poor and secretly funding government activities which the people would otherwise not support, like raping nuns in Nicaragua. The American people just don't go in for that sort of thing. So if we all pretend that the so-called War on Drugs is well intentioned then we don't have to be outraged at this evil that is actually done intentionally.

Society is collapsing around us. Are we going to continue responding to poverty by locking up hundreds of thousands of people on petty drug charges? Are we going to continue to allow the petro-chemical and timber industries to destroy the Earth rather than decrease their profits by using an alternative like hemp? Are we going to continue to allow the CIA and military intelligence to put down democratic movements all over the world and support corrupt capital friendly dictatorships with the profits from the sale of cocaine and heroin? It is time we just admitted that the so-called War on Drugs is not an accident, but really a War On Working People, especially people of color and poor people!

In spite of all the Drug War programs, marijuana is still the biggest cash crop in California and Hawaii. We should be taxing it, and using the money for public health and education programs. Legalization is actually easy, and it has to be done. The alternative is quite obviously far, far more destructive than the drugs themselves. The hard part will be banning advertising for all drugs, especially alcohol and tobacco -- the real killers.

That's the real solution, you know, make all drugs legal to have and sell, but not to advertise.

(May 1996)

Shortly after the Unabomber suspect was arrested, the stand-off between the FBI and the so-called Freemen was settling in, and the beef market collapsed in England -- due to Mad Cow disease, some witty person in the beleaguered state of Montana came up with a new slogan for their license plates: Montana -- At Least Our Cows Aren't Crazy!

I still think that is one of the funniest things I've heard in years. Its funny because its true. There is no Mad Cow disease in Montana, and the people were starting to get a reputation for being insane. The joke acknowledges what most people know -- that right-wing politics are irrational. Yet this insanity is spreading in our current climate of economic insecurity.

Even in the insanity there can be truth -- I think this is why people are fascinated with the "Patriots," "Sovereigns," or "Freemen." The "Freemen" have said that the U.S. government is a "Corporate Prostitute." Which is true, and fundamental to any realistic analysis of society. Working people are losing their rights, their livelihoods, and their dignity due to the government and the corporations the government serves. Why do you think a fruitloop like Pat Buchanan could do so well -- he was at least hinting at the truth in with the rest of his nationalist ideas.

The craziness comes into play when you look at how the right-wing thinks we should respond to social problems. They think that if we let everyone have a gun and let them avoid taxes that somehow this will help ordinary Americans. The right-wing claims that if society does not have laws which structure our interactions with each other, and define the limits of what is and is not acceptable, that somehow out of anarchy will come justice. Isn't that what they want? They want the government and its laws out of business.

This is insane. Doesn't it occur to these people that government was basically structured like that in the 19th Century, and yet the government was still a Corporate Prostitute? During the course of the 20th century people have forced compromises on

corporations such that corporations had to make at least some concessions to society and collective interests. We tax corporations to pay for insurance, workers's compensation, and more. Taxes are supposed to be the vehicle by which people who control more resources fulfill their obligations to society.

Now, of course, the government represents the ruling class. This is a truism. Marx put it this way: the government is the executive committee of the ruling class, in this case capitalists, the people who own the corporations. Without taxes and other constraints on business and property we would still live in a world that looked like a Dickens play -- poor people starving in the streets after their 37th consecutive 14 hour day at the factory. The particular laws which have taken us away from that scenario are a result of class struggle -- working people forcing compromises upon the wealthy few. And this struggle continues.

The right-wing wants to go back to a time before the rich had to compromise at all -- to a time when rich people could just tell the governor of some state to have soldiers machine gun and burn striking workers, like J.D. Rockefeller did at Ludlow, Colorado. To think that this state of affairs is somehow better is insane. The lunatic fringe of the right-wing thinks that others are trying to control them, in the case of "Freemen" or "Patriots" it is through laws and taxes. There is a kernel of truth in this because we as a society have determined that there are limits to behavior. These laws are not personal, except when rich people buy laws to let them avoid equal treatment. Allowing the rich more free reign will not make this situation better, it will only mean that working people will be forced by the "market" to work for even lower wages, in more dangerous places, with fewer days and hours off, with less and less job security as in Russia or Mexico today.

So why do you suppose the government is so patient with the few right-wing fanatics running around the country? Why do you suppose that the right-wing in Congress says the same things that the "Patriots" say about taxes and environmental protection laws? And why would rich people have given money to a fascist politician like Buchanan? Perhaps Buchanan is not actually insane, but really understands what he is doing and really wants a world in which there are no limits on corporations, but there are amazing limits on working people? A world just like Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco dreamed of.

It is not necessarily irrational for rich people to support right-wing policies, because those policies are inevitably in their interest. The right-wing, no matter how much it complains about Corporate Prostitutes, still supports laws which give the highest rights to the largest property owners, to the very same corporations for whom the government works. Right-wing politics is pragmatic if you are rich. It is insane and self-destructive if you are an ordinary working person.

The political struggle may yet be incomplete, full of fits and starts, but a lack of complete success does not mean that the struggle is fruitless. We have won some concessions, and we will win more and more if the right-wing is not allowed to divide us. Fascism promises easy solutions to the more complicated problem of class struggle -- but in the end the right-wing offers only an empty pipe dream, while the rich continue to make off with all the money. Working people are ultimately the victims of right-wing politics.

We confuse these issues at our own peril.

(June 1996)

"Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy" (Proverbs 31: 8-9).

I think it is about time for us to get seriously concerned about the state of the Supreme Court. In particular I am, personally, deeply concerned about Justice Antonin Scalia -- who seems recently to have lost his ability to reason. Correct me if I am wrong, but it seems to me that the ability to reason logically is sort of important for a Supreme Court Justice.

Some may be wondering what tipped me off that Scalia is not all there anymore (if he ever was). Justice Scalia attended a conference on politics and the public good in Rome at the beginning of May and commented, "The allure of socialism for Christians is that it means well, that it is altruistic.... But it can also deprive Christians of a chance for sanctification" (AP, 5/3/96).

Which is all well and good, Christians are supposed to do good deeds, and capitalism provides ample opportunities, whereas socialism -- because it provides for the public good -- doesn't need Christians for people to live well. In socialism there is no need for Christian charity. Socialism is the economics of Christ and Christian living. "And all those who had believed were together, and they had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need" (Acts 2: 44-45).

In a socialist system, Scalia laments, there are no poor and oppressed for whom the rich may do token deeds of good will.

Scalia must have lost his mind. Is he actually implying that a society in which there are plenty of open wells (for example) into which unsuspecting elderly women are pushed would somehow be morally superior because such a society would offer "Christians" the chance to rescue the victims? I think that is what he is saying. In fact, in the same speech he maintained that although capitalism encourages, in fact demands, the elevation of the cardinal sin of greed to become the guiding principle of society, this same elevation of greed allows religious-oriented aid groups to flourish. Which is also true, but is about the most perverted defense of the cynical evil of capitalism I have ever read.

Scalia is actually saying that a system which oppresses the vast majority of people, values only greed, and results in the destruction of planetary environments and the violent suppression of hundreds of millions is a better system because it provides an opportunity for Christians to do charity. By this logic Nazi Germany had the highest form of government because it provided such varied opportunities for people to do good deeds -- if good Christians didn't end up dead themselves for trying. But hey, that just shows the sincerity of Scalia's do-gooders because they could be gassed along with those needy souls that were lucky enough to be on the receiving end of the charity.

There is a sickness in our society, and I think Scalia has illustrated it, embodied it, with perfection. Right-wing thinking and class collaborationist attitudes have become commonplace in our society. So much so that the newspaper in which I encountered

Scalia's remarks had the audacity to title the piece "Justice Raps Socialism," rather than "Justice Embarrasses Self in Public."

Although it is interesting to note that the context of Scalia's remarks was the observation that socialist ideas are gaining more and more prominence around the world as people discover the inherent barbarism and senseless cruelty of capitalism. It is also interesting that Scalia concedes that socialism offers the only hope of significant improvements in society, where capitalism requires that large numbers of people suffer from poverty, sickness, and alienation. Ironically, Scalia made his remarks shortly before a new Communist led coalition was elected in Italy.

Scalia is concerned that the ruling class he represents is falling from grace. Which is true historically, though it is difficult to say how long it will take. If he is really concerned about sanctification, though, perhaps Justice Scalia should try being part of the solution instead of being part of the problem.

"For He will deliver the needy when he cries for help, the afflicted also, and him who has no helper. He will have compassion on the poor and needy. And the lives of the needy he will save. He will rescue their life from oppression and violence; and their blood will be precious in his sight" (Psalm 72: 12-14).

(July 1996)

"They [people] hate the [Saudi] regime. To them, the Americans are a symbol of everything they loathe: corruption, joblessness, exclusion from decision-making, and this nurtured hatred of everything alien. But their real target, and the subject of their wrath, is the regime." -- unnamed "Senior Saudi Arabian Official" NY Times, 6/28/96

By two days after the truck bombing in Dhahran the corporate press had rallied around the U.S. policy in Saudi Arabia. "The United States and Saudi Arabia are joined in a difficult but necessary relationship," the Daily Camera opined. "The Dhahran attack is a challenge to our presence in and commitment to the region," the Longmont Times-Call claimed. And, perhaps the most bizarre comment on the bombing came from the Denver Post: "But we will and must continue to work for a world where human beings everywhere are secure in their homes, safe from the midnight knock of the Gestapo, free from the ravages of armies bent on rape and 'ethnic cleansing' and beyond the reach of the terrorists' bomb." And, according to the NY Times, "Both [Secretary of State] Christopher and Prince Saud Faisal, the Saudi foreign minister, vowed that the attack would not deter their two countries for extensive military cooperation... to contain threats poised by Iran and Iraq."

Someone must think the rest of us are fools, drooling on ourselves, wandering about the world completely confused and so out of touch that we are likely to believe their demented inversion of reality? It was, after all, corporate interests that the Gestapo was ultimately protecting, as is the case with the Saudi secret police, and it was the CIA and our State Department that whipped up ethnic hatred in Yugoslavia for forty years.

We cannot be surprised that the U.S. government would scream "Terrorism" when bombs begin blowing up an alien army in some far off foreign land -- at least when that alien army is our own. Of course if it is our bombs killing innocents, like the two to three hundred thousand Iraqi civilians we killed in the Gulf War, then, of course, it is

called War. But patriots defending their homeland against the ravages of constant injustice in Saudi Arabia is called terrorism.

Did we learn nothing from the Iranian experience? For decades the U.S. military and intelligence services propped up a despotic ruler and helped that regime torture and murder the ever growing opposition. Until finally, after they had killed off all of the progressive opposition, the only opposition left to speak for the people were the religious fundamentalists. Sure, the CIA thought they could buy them off, but it didn't happen, and in 1979 the oil companies lost Iran, just over 20 years after a CIA organized coup had brought the Shah to power.

Today, in 1996, we look to Saudi Arabia, where a 3,000 member royal family extracts virtually all the wealth generated in a country with a quarter of the world's oil reserves. OIL RESERVES. So our army, air force, and the CIA help the despotic Saud family maintain its strangle hold on wealth and power. And then the corporate media acts all surprised and indignant when religious fundamentalists (probably) set off bombs outside U.S. military compounds.

The next day, President Clinton went to Lyon, France for the G-7 meeting. He complained about so-called international terrorism. They derided him for the immoral, illegal, and cruel blockade of Cuba. Our president can just invent a reality which is comfortable for corporations, and the media will parrot it. Other countries are often more sophisticated and their presidents have to deal with actual reality. Clinton even had the gall to say, "We must rally the forces of tolerance and freedom everywhere to work against terrorism." "Tolerance and Freedom," in Saudi Arabia? Clinton actually said this with a straight face. But in Saudi Arabia who is the terrorist: the ones who fight for freedom from the tyranny of a corrupt king, or the ones who torture and murder the political opponents of that king?

It is embarrassing. What does it say for our country that our president and ruling class cry terrorism when people fight against their tyranny, and then have the audacity to proclaim their undying devotion to the cause of "freedom"? Whose freedom? Certainly not the Saudi people's freedom -- the people remain the virtual slaves of American oil interests via an utterly corrupt puppet, called the House of Saud.

There are higher principles in the world, and people will take a stand and fight for those principles. That is why the remaining people of Iran eventually rose up against the Shah. And higher principle is why the U.S. military will continue to be a target of warfare in Saudi Arabia.

It is time to learn the lessons of Iran, and not allow the CIA, oil companies, and House of Saud to drive Saudi Arabia into the hands of fundamentalists. We must rally the forces of humanity and democracy everywhere to work against tyranny.

(August 1996)

Some months ago a man was released from a state mental hospital, after having attempted to murder his own father. This man had a daughter who lived with his ex-wife. In July, the daughter was visiting the father in a suburb of Denver, per a court order which required the mother to allow visits. One evening the daughter went home,

reluctantly, after spending the day with neighborhood friends. The father brutally raped and murdered her.

Why did this happen? Who is responsible, and how can we prevent this from ever happening again?

Is the father to blame? Probably not, he is, after all, completely insane -- obviously. We cannot hold the insane morally or practically responsible for such actions because they are not aware of the reality of their actions. Moral responsibility requires an awareness that what one is doing is wrong, or injurious to others. The father is not one of those graduates of the School of the Americas run by the CIA and US Army at Ft. Benning, Georgia which trains professional torturers. They are morally responsible, the father in this instance is not.

Are the neighbors who sent the daughter home, in spite of her protests, responsible? Probably not, they did not have any idea what they were sending her home to. Although part of the tragedy is that they feel responsible.

And what about the judge who ordered unsupervised visitation with a crazed murderer? Is he or she responsible? Maybe. Although the judge was only interpreting existing laws which give parents rights.

Perhaps the responsible parties are the people from the co-called "Family Values" lobby and their ideological allies who work overtime to create a legal system which undermines all sense of collective responsibility or community in our society. These people must bear a significant amount of the responsibility. If they are so hot on holding people responsible for their actions, then let them be held responsible for the societal implications of their destructive actions.

Society is not a collection of isolated individuals each pursuing their own economic interests with no moral ties to each other. I realize that this "human as isolated automaton" is fundamental to the supposed values of capitalist society -- but it is still not only inhuman, it is sick and wrong.

There is a saying from Africa, that it takes a village to raise a child. These days the right-wing, with its so-called "Parental Rights" ballot initiatives (especially here in Colorado) are doing all they can to eliminate any possibility of the village, town, city, county, or state helping parents raise their children, let alone provide for the parents wellbeing.

Every society is a collective. We can ignore this, and pretend that it is not true, or we can engage our humanity and live with each other -- with intention. Too many people experience society as cold, unfeeling, cruel, and threatening. And it is for many -- although for those with mental illness these feelings can be unnecessarily overwhelming. There is no good reason for any society to exacerbate these feelings. And it is fundamentally immoral for a society to not care for those who are unable to care for themselves.

Society is not an accident, either waiting to or having happened. When the government eliminates protections for children, for working people having a difficult time finding a job, for parents who are only able to earn the minimum wage and thus cannot make ends meet, or when it guts environmental protections which exist for the benefit of all just so some corporation can make ever more profits than that government has abdicated any moral claim to authority -- it has become a mockery of itself.

And this is the condition in which we now find ourselves. The Republicans and Democrats are fighting over which can more efficiently represent the interests of giant corporations against people -- ordinary human beings. There is no moral good to a system which gives more rights to business than to children. There is no moral good to a system which defines the property rights of parents -- insane or not -- as being greater than the rights of children to a safe, and loving home.

Children are not property, and the parental rights movement is an evil which seeks to define them as such. The greatest interest in the well being of the children is the interest of the state -- the interest of us all. Parents will come and go, but it is the collective which must suffer the parents' failings -- through court systems, prisons, hospitals, etc.

We hold these truths to be self evident, that all humans are equal, and by virtue of this equality are endowed with certain inalienable rights, among them are the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The right to own children or slaves, let alone a mountain or a river, is not included in this list. To compromise the right to the pursuit of happiness for the majority just so a minority can "own" mountains or rivers is fundamentally sick and wrong.

So just who is responsible for the torture and death of that little girl? We all are. Society is a collective that creates its own reality -- and the violence and bombings which are becoming ever more present in our society are the bitter fruit of our misguided labors. Clearly, then, we are laboring in the wrong general direction -- wrong, at least, if our intention is to create a humane society.

(September 1996)

Have you seen the photo of Binti-Jua carrying that 3 year old boy to the gate in her primate pen at the Brookfield Zoo? AP got a hold of someone's home video showing the whole thing. Binti-Jua, an 18 month old lowland gorilla, carried the fallen human child to a place where other humans could retrieve him. A couple of weeks later, I found myself crying into my coffee when I saw the photo -- it was beautiful!

We humans have not often demonstrated that kind of compassion towards our cousin species. But a gorilla, in spite of being locked in a cage, saw this small child in trouble and went out of her way to help. She probably saved the boy's life. It was amazing, and humbling.

During the same week a high school junior convinced the spineless, witless, and morally bankrupt school board of Jefferson County, Colorado, to pull a science video that happened to mention the scientific fact of evolution. It turns out that this student felt that his religious beliefs were being trampled by reality and he preferred not to be forced to deal with reality in school. The school board, which wanted to try to respect students various points of view, agreed that reality is not an essential component of contemporary education.

As I recall that was also the week that NASA and other scientists announced that they think they have found evidence of life on Mars -- old and dead now, but life. I am guessing that the lunatic fringe is having as hard a time with that as evolution. Life on other planets is just one more challenge to self imposed ignorance -- the drug of choice

for the right-wing. Solutions to complicated problems are much more fun and much simpler to formulate if you don't sweat reality.

What I want to know is if a juvenile lowland gorilla recognizes its kinship with humans and demonstrates this recognition with compassion and nurturing, then how can the lunatic fringe of Christianity -- which is made up of humans -- be so slow? We are, after all, intellectually superior to lowland gorillas. At least most of us are, even most Christians. Some people seem to have a little catching up to do, though. I can't help but wonder about the supposed values of this lunatic fringe when a gorilla exhibits significantly more "humanity" than they do.

Times are tough all over for Christians. Most of them are actually good people, and don't support the lunatic fringe either. But as Christians they share some of the same labels with the lunatics and are often lumped into the same categories of mindless, cruel, and reactionary.

What bothers me is that religious fanatics have taken advantage of the culture of tolerance which has been born of the struggles of the last century, much of which is also the struggle of decent, caring, honest Christians. The school board in question did not want to trample on the deeply held beliefs of one of their students. Which on the surface sounds like a good idea -- an idea which thousands have died for, and millions more have demonstrated in the streets to achieve. But when tolerance is extended to self imposed ignorance then we have lost touch with its purpose.

Tolerance is a good thing. And it is also good to respect the right of all people to have to their own opinions. But when those opinions are just silly then we have to draw the line. The right to irrational beliefs cannot be allowed to threaten the quality of education for all. And if reality is threatening to one's religious beliefs then perhaps it is the religious beliefs which should be banned from school and not the video which exposes them. Oh, wait a minute, I thought religious beliefs were separate from public schooling?

Which leads one to wonder about the true purpose of the Republicans insistence on imposing so-called Christian values in public education. If Christian values -- at least in the form that is representative of the Republican platform -- are at odds with the real world then which would win out if the Republicans had more control over our lives than they do now? If Bob Dole was president would students in high school biology class learn science or would they learn superstition? And isn't that all it is? If someone believes something which runs contrary to all evidence then they are irrational. If these same people become congressmen and women or the president and they impose this irrational superstition on everyone then we have returned to the Dark Ages. Why were the Dark Ages dark? Forced ignorance and superstition.

Even a gorilla knows better!

(October 1996)

So, the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), the nation's largest police organization, has decided to endorse a Democrat for President of these United States -- for the first time in its history. I understand that the police and the Republicans have not been getting

on lately since the Republicans have adopted the NRA's position that everyone should have an automatic weapon with cop killer bullets.

You might have thought that the FOP would have given up on the Republicans, as most Americans have, many years ago. But it took the FOP some time to reach this conclusion on its own, and significant contradictions in their positions remain. To my way of thinking the FOP still treats its members as expendable items, sacrificed according to political whim or corporate need.

The point here is that just because some big organization claims to represent the interests of a group of working people, does not mean that it actually does. For example, what is the FOP's position on the so-called war on drugs? They're for it. The FOP thinks a war on drugs is the greatest thing since sliced bread. And in whose interest is the so-called war on drugs?

Well, we now know that the original source of crack cocaine in the inner cities in America was the CIA, thanks to an informative and extensively documented series of articles two months ago in the **San Jose Mercury News**. We also know that the CIA started its drug habit by selling opium and heroin to finance its wars against democracy and humanity in South East Asia in the 1960's and 1970's. We know that the CIA sold heroin in the 1970's and 1980's to finance its war against people and self-determination in Afghanistan, and then cocaine and crack to finance its wars against decency and justice in Latin America.

We also know that when the CIA is involved with operations domestically, such as selling drugs, that local police departments -- and even the DEA -- are helpless to stop them. Usually the police are powerless to even arrest the key people involved, let alone stop the flow of drugs. Thus it seems that the number one source of dangerous drugs in America is the CIA, and the police are powerless to do anything about it.

We also know that criminalizing drugs or alcohol, in addition to increasing profits, generates a culture of crime and violence, of which local police officers are among the victims. So why is it that the FOP supports continuing the so-called war on drugs? It can't be because they want to stop the flow of drugs into our cities, because their involvement is irrelevant to that issue. It can't be to protect their members lives, because in the end it is FOP members who end up among the dead.

Politicians and the leadership of the FOP can go on TV and express outrage that police officers are killed by 13 year olds with Mac-10s. That makes for great sound bites. But how is it that 13 year olds came to need, let alone afford, Mac-10 machine pistols? The CIA! My point being that CIA drug sales over the decades have created situations in which 13 year olds not only can afford machine pistols, but actually believe that they need them as well.

If we are serious about cutting drug use and violence in this country then two courses of action are called for. First, we must eliminate the CIA -- the largest drug pushing operation on the face of the Earth! And second, we must decriminalize drugs -- replacing crime and violence with treatment and human compassion.

The most critical flaw in our democratic ideal is this persistent fog of denial in which we live. Drug pushing by the CIA is not new, nor are other abuses of human dignity and human rights. Yet we persist in pretending that if we hold just one more set of Congressional hearings that the problem will go away. It is not the agency, but rogue elements in the agency which are to blame -- or so we are instructed to believe. Enough

is enough, it is the agency that is the problem! The rogue elements are those who resist the culture of destruction and violence at the CIA and leak the truth.

How many more children must die? How many more hundreds of thousands of lives must be destroyed before we find the resolve to act? And how many more police officers must die needlessly before the Fraternal Order of Police decides to end its support for the slaughter of the innocents -- the so-called war on drugs?

(November 1996)

Something very important is happening in and around Afghanistan recently.

After 18 years of war, waged largely by various armed groups organized and financed by the CIA, Pakistani Intelligence, and the sale of heroin, society in Afghanistan is on the verge of collapse. Things might not be as bad as they have become, but the people chosen by the CIA to wage a guerrilla war against the democratically elected government of President Najibullah (who was recently murdered) happen to be the most extreme religious fanatics to gain power on a national level since the late 1300's.

Upon conquering the capital of Kabul, the Taliban militia -- which is composed of people schooled in Islamic thought (sort of) by Pakistani agents -- decreed that women will not work outside the home, and girls will not be educated. The reaction by the world community was swift though stunned. Most of the professionals and white collar workers in Afghanistan are women -- the men having been killed in war. These female workers also staffed relief agencies trying to provide some level of subsistence to Afghanistan. After September 27, 1996 they were sent home, and at this writing had yet to return.

That is not the important bit. It is significant that a government in the 20th Century would decree new discrimination against a majority of their population -- but such is the work of the CIA. What is very important is world reaction -- aid agencies, both private and governmental, and national policy leaders from around the world. People were shocked, stunned, and immediately began to stop their programs in protest. Not that it really took much effort to stop the aid and education programs, what with the lack of employees to keep them going.

Aid work was stopped out of necessity and principle. This is the important bit: the world community agreed that any one nation's religious beliefs did not supersede the universal principle of human rights.

To be sure, experts in Islam, secular and religious, have been denouncing the Taliban's version of Shari'a (Islamic Law) as flawed both practically and theologically. This is to be expected. These religious experts realize the significance of world reaction. If they can portray the Taliban as an exception, a mistake, then the significance of world opinion might be mitigated. But it is very important for the cause of human rights that world opinion is clearly and obviously willing to trample on the deeply held religious beliefs of people or nations who willfully choose to violate human rights.

The implications of this development are tremendous and no doubt threatening to fundamentalists around the world. The anti-choice movement in this country, for example, must by now see the writing on the wall. The anti-choice movement is based on a subtle but pervasive belief that humans are the inalienable possession of other

powers -- presumably God. Though the origins of this belief -- and the theology which opposes contraception, homosexuality, and abortion -- dates from the Middle Ages when the ruling class claimed that the peasantry, aka ordinary people, were the property of the various monarchies. Religious dictators then, of course, claimed that the Princes and Kings represented God -- the so-called Divine Right of Kings. But in the end the ruling class simply wanted to own everyone, as well as everything.

The Taliban obviously have the same sorts of beliefs -- especially as regards women and children, who are just chattel now. The fundamentalists here are trying to create the same system of laws in America vis-a-vis children, whom they believe should be property -- chattel.

But the tide is turning, the world is becoming more rational. And with that change is the turn to a system of ethics based on logical argument, and the commonalities of human experience. Some religious people argue that ethics requires religious belief. This position, while at times may be well intentioned, is absurd. The appeal to a higher authority than human experience for ethical beliefs inevitably results in terribly unethical consequences.

The claim that ethics requires a higher power is contradictory. Ethics based on a standard other than human end up in justifications for the most extreme barbarism and senseless cruelty. This happens because human life becomes expendable if one claims to have purposes which transcend human experience.

I have always believed in the ethics of decreasing suffering, that is, that which is good is that which contributes to a reduction in the level of suffering tolerated by human beings. And I am heartened that this point of view has won out! True, there are hangers on still grasping at the last straws of the ethics of domination, like the Christian Coalition or the Taliban, but those people will eventually disappear and the world will be a beautiful and happy place without them. World opinion has been expressed, and it is firmly in support of human rights. And someday, hopefully soon, even the US will recognize the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

(December 1996)

“When I give food to the poor they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food they call me a Communist.” -- Bishop Helder Camara (Brazil)

I recently heard someone saying that they are already sick unto death of the "Holiday Season." The first Christmas ads appeared about Halloween and show no sign of letting up. Someday, they probably won't let up and we will have to live with perpetual Xmas advertising.

Some say that Christmas has become a graphic symbol of the ugly realities of the Free Market -- its alleged sickness and depravity. After all, does anyone out there remember what the original celebration behind Xmas was? If I recall correctly it had something to do with the Prince of Peace, but those memories have long since faded from public view. The purpose of Xmas these days is an orgy of consumption.

Xmas is a metaphor for Postmodern life -- life as consumption. In the 20th century we no longer work to produce or simply to live, we work to consume. Consumption is the meaning of life in capitalist society. In the past people used to have religion, and I think Xmas had something to do with that.

Not since the 19th Century have we had meaning outside of consuming. But some people are not happy with the new culture of late capitalism. They say that being human is more than buying crap at malls. They say that being human has more to do with being, experiencing, and sharing, than it does with clothes shavers, electric razors, and Toys 'R Destroying Our Moral Fiber stores.

Some of these people work for an outfit called Bread for the World. They may be good people, but seem not to have been grasped by the insidious tentacles of consumerism. The people at Bread for World spend their days working out how we can feed everyone. Last month, they got a little press attention -- between the ads for athletic shoes, and items with batteries not included -- at the World Food Conference.

Bread for the World says we have millions of people going hungry every day, here as well as in the Third World. They say that we have had plenty of food to feed everyone every year since the last World Food Conference in 1974, but it turns out that poor people don't have enough money to buy food. They say the cause of hunger is not a shortage of food, but an unwillingness of the Free Market to supply food to people without money.

Bread for the World is not even alone in this blasphemy. During last month's World Food Conference in Rome about a thousand non-governmental organizations from Europe, the Americas, and Asia gathered across town from the official gathering to talk about the hunger problem. They decided that the cause of hunger is, in fact, the Free Market. These people even had the gall to complain when the conference participates drafted a document which acknowledged that access to food is a human right, and the US government -- protector of the Free market -- refused to sign the resolution.

Now of course these Bread people are completely out of step with the rest of the world -- at least with the governments that represent wealthy people. The governments of wealthy people have decided that the Free Market will solve all our problems. Any problems that remain are merely the product of a deranged imagination. Poor people just need to organize themselves into consumers. Poor people must participate in the Free Market and then the Free Market will solve their problems too -- just like it did for the wealthy people.

Some people might say that the wealthy people were, for the most part, wealthy before the Free Market, at least their families were. But we can be sure that the Free Market generates more and more wealth for the rich, while, only accidentally, preventing poor people the world over from eating.

Besides, people starving is a small price to pay for Xmas. We need our orgy of consumption! So what if no one remembers why we originally started celebrating Xmas in the first place. That is not the point. The point is that today we can go out and buy plastic things that break the next day. We can listen to children whining for these items, and witness the joy on their little faces as they bow down before their graven images, and unwrap their golden calves, shrieking with glee, "Santa got the wrong one, I wanted Malibu Barbie!!"

So if you are one of the lucky few who has money, and therefore food, just remember were you got it -- the Free Market. If the Free Market is good enough for you then to hell with the people who starve to death. We need our clothes shavers! Why should we care if poor people can't get enough to eat? That's them, its not me!

What nags at me, though, is: Why, then, do the people in pictures of the poor; people living on the streets, people diving in dumpsters, and standing in soup kitchen lines look just like you and me?