

# the Socialist

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## Editorial

### Oil, Politics and the Making of the State

*The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.*

This little gem comes from the *Communist Manifesto*. Authors, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels argue that economic elites also need political control exercised through the state. The two worked together. However, this much-cited quote has led to many controversies among socialists attempting to understand the effects of this or that policy or the impact of economic elites on particular political debates.

Today, it is even more difficult to recognize how these two parts of society – the capitalist class and the state – are adhered together. The state, even isolated to its executive function, is a complex set of departments, advisors and functionaries. Private industry is equally spread out among multiple corporations, private, often competing, interests and industry groups.

Yet, moments of crisis offer opportunities to observe the links between the state and economic elites. BP's recent oil explosion in the Gulf of Mexico did more than pour millions of gallons of oil into the environment. It exposed the relationship between a multinational corporation and, by extension, the energy sector and the US government. This allowed a chance to measure the degree to which modern corporations direct the activities of the state and how such control comes about.

The spotlight of the crisis allowed people to recognize that politicians were putting the public at risk by complying with the wishes of the energy sector even before the Deepwater Horizon exploded. The Bush Administration operated the scandal-ridden Department of the Interior (DOI) as a rubber stamp for industry and a site to disseminate anti-global warming "science." Obama has kept things low profile but equally industry-controlled at the DOI by appointing noted industry ally, Ken Salazar. Salazar's Mineral Management Services dutifully delivered more than

250 inspection waivers to energy companies engaged in offshore drilling.

In return, the campaign contributions kept flowing and the lobbyists continued to shape policy. Campaign contributions from the Oil and Gas

sector surged from about \$8 million in 1990 to more than \$33 million in 2008. Lobbying also increased sharply from around \$51 million in 2000 to \$175 million in 2009. Buying off the state has certainly become more expensive as private corporations plow deeper roots into all aspects of society creating, in effect, a corporate state.

The oil explosion grew out of this process as energy companies expanded their field of operations and legislators abandoned the public trust. As a result, ideas about things like public ownership, regulation and green energy were set aside or presented as outdated notions.

However, once the Deepwater Horizon exploded, the public could see how deeply the energy companies had penetrated in the state. BP, and not the toothless government, was calling the shots in the Gulf – determining who got to photograph the site, which scientists could conduct tests and the speed of cleanup. The government had little to offer. BP controlled all of the experts, the facilities and the resources. At points, the Hollywood actor Kevin Costner, with his fancy oil removal machine and director James Cameron, with his fleet of submarines, seemed more relevant than President Barack Obama.

Instead of facing a nationalization order, BP CEO Tony Hayward was allowed to refuse to answer questions at a Congressional hearing one day and be an invitee to a private White House meeting the next.



*Continued on p15*

## Statement of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY strives to establish a radical democracy that places people's lives under their own control - a non-racist, classless, feminist socialist society... where working people own and control the means of production and distribution through democratically-controlled public agencies; where full employment is realized for everyone who wants to work; where workers have the right to form unions freely, and to strike and engage in other forms of job actions; and where the production of society is used for the benefit of all humanity, not for the private profit of a few. We believe socialism and democracy are one and indivisible. The working class is in a key and central position to fight back against the ruling capitalist class and its power. The working class is the major force worldwide that can lead the way to a socialist future - to a real radical democracy from below. The Socialist Party fights for progressive changes compatible with a socialist future. We support militant working class struggles and electoral action, independent of the capitalist controlled two-party system, to present socialist alternatives. We strive for democratic revolutions - radical and fundamental changes in the structure and quality of economic, political, and personal relations - to abolish the power now exercised by the few who control great wealth and the government. The Socialist Party is a democratic, multi-tendency organization, with structure and practices visible and accessible to all members.



## BP and the Workers: A Crime By Any Other Name...

Zelig Stern



Michelle Jones is now a single mother of two. This was not the plan for her life. On April 20, 2010, Michelle was eight months pregnant with her second child when her husband, Gordon Jones, was killed while working on the Deepwater Horizon. Gordon died in the oil explosion that is still plaguing the Gulf of Mexico. Now, Michelle has to raise her two children without their father. Gordon's tragic death was not an unavoidable accident or the result of random bad luck. Gordon died, along with ten other workers, because, to BP, the bottom line was more important than their lives.

Despite the large number of denials coming from corporate executives, it has become clear in the months following the explosion that BP was cutting corners on safety in order to reduce costs and increase profit. For example, BP had selected to use a potentially risky well casing as opposed to a traditional well casing because the risky model was \$7 to \$10 billion cheaper. Additionally, many key safety features on the rig had not been inspected since 2000, despite the fact that law requires an inspection every three years. A confidential survey taken weeks before the explosion indicated that workers on the rig were well aware of the safety hazards they faced in their workplace but were afraid to speak up due to fear of reprisals from the company. One worker, quoted in the *New York Times* on July 21, stated, "Run

it, break it, fix it, that's how they work."

Besides cutting corners on safety features, in the two months prior to the explosion BP began pushing a speed-up on the workers. Jason Anderson, a toolpusher, equivalent to foreman, on the rig and one of the eleven workers to lose their lives on April 20, began telling his father in February that BP was urging him to speed-up work. This is a typical tactic for companies trying to get more out of their workers for the same amount of pay. Jason had twice before convinced BP management on previous wells not to push speed-ups due to safety issues. This time, there was no convincing them. With workers forced to work twice as fast it became increasingly difficult to follow safety procedures properly and to avoid mistakes. Between the corner cutting on safety features and the speed up, it was only a matter of time until someone got hurt.

BP does not do these things because of some malicious feelings toward workers, they do it because their number one concern is and must always be maximizing profit. Regardless of the intent, the executives of BP knowingly placed workers in conditions where it was inevitable that some would be injured or killed. To illustrate this point, apart from the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe, the oil industry saw 13 fires leading to the death of 19 workers and the injury of 25 more in the months

*Continued on p11*

## Contents

- 2 Oil, Politics and the State
- 3 BP and the Workers  
Zelig Stern
- 4 Nationalize 'Em!  
S. Rossignol & B. Wharton
- 5 Cindy Sheehan on Oil
- 5 It's Not the Crimes
- 6 Interview with Stephen Zunes
- 7 Economic Recovery for the Few  
Rick Wolff
- 8 Capping the Oil Spill  
Dan LaBotz
- 10 Worker Self-Management  
Bill Templer
- 14 What We're Reading

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## What To Do About Big Oil? Nationalize 'Em!

by Steve Rossignol and Billy Wharton



If there is one lesson to be learned from the massive British Petroleum Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico, it is that Big Oil has no conscience when it comes to killing workers and raping the environment in their quest for profits. In the case of BP, even overlooking the diabolical role they played in the overthrow of the democratically elected Mosaddegh Government in Iran in 1953, the petroleum giant has ignored safety regulations, manipulated federal regulators, and possibly even had a hand in the parole of convicted Lockerbie bomber Abdel Baset al-Megrahi in order to curry an oil contract from Libya.

Civilized nations do not allow their citizens to act in this manner. Why do we allow corporate giants to do so? The time has come for us to put aside our dark fears and loudly start saying that dirty word dreaded by Tea Baggers everywhere: Nationalization.

Once an integral plank of socialist platforms everywhere, the concept of “nationalization” lost grace in the 70s in favor of less offensive terminology, like “socialization” or “workers’ control.” The connection to any sort of state-owned or state-controlled economy was a boogeyman with which no one dared be associated. All that free-market stuff, you know. But the reality of government regulation in the so-called free market is that regulation usually comes as a result of massive corporate abuse, which finally prompts

the government to act.

Well, times change, but the oil industry hasn’t. All we have to do is take a look at the latest corporate abuser of the natural world, BP. The outrages have become such that mere regulation is no longer effective in curtailling the abuses of the industry. We need to do more to lasso in the oil industry.

Nationalization, or whatever we word we use, will no doubt raise the hackles of so-called “free market” folks. But what about that free market? Guess what. There ain’t no such unicorn. When the oil industry cartel can whimsically escalate gasoline and heating oil prices at will, grant obscene bonuses to executives at tax-payer expense, generate record profits with the help of massive government subsidies, manipulate energy futures on the stock market, fail to build new refineries in order to keep gas prices up, and flagrantly violate federal regulations, it is time to face the very real fact that the oil companies are thumbing their noses at the American people. There is no “free enterprise” here. And the added myth that the “industry will regulate itself,” as we have been told for decades, makes us rather want to believe in the Tooth Fairy. Polluting companies like BP just don’t “do” cleanup – there is no profit in it. We could go on and on about the cardinal sins of these energy giants, but I do not think that there is

*Continued on p15*



## Cindy Sheehan on Oil and Politics



*The Socialist recently had the chance to sit down with “Peace Mom” Cindy Sheehan and ask her about her thoughts on the connection between oil and politics.*

**The Socialist:** There has been a lot of news recently about the BP oil explosion in the Gulf. There has been a real disconnect between the role of the oil companies and the US wars and the role of the military industrial complex. What connections do you see between oil and politics?

**Cindy Sheehan:** That’s a really complicated question. As soon as the oil explosion happened and as soon as we were allowed to know the scope of the disaster, I wrote an

article called “You’ll Pry My Car Out of My Cold Dead Hands.” It’s not only our government’s and our military industrial complex’s addiction to petroleum or petroleum-based products, but it’s our own. We want to blame Tony Hayward or Halliburton, but very few people want to place any blame on the Obama administration, because you know the Bush Administration was filled with oil people. There are many people in the Mineral Management Services that Obama kept from the Bush Administration. We need to recognize the fact that Ken Salazar is a big fan of offshore drilling while being the Secretary of the Interior. Our entire economy, our entire foreign policy, our entire domestic policy seems to revolve around oil. So, we have very poor public transportation in this country. In the places where we do have public transportation, it is very expensive and not very accessible to a wide population. People who can afford it would rather drive their cars. I lived in Washington, D.C. for two weeks without a car. Washington has the best public transportation system in the country, but it is still very difficult to live in this society without a car. I don’t have a car in California either. Instead of only worrying about capping the well, and cleaning up, and hearing politicians say that we have to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, we need to reduce our dependence on all oil, natural gas, and coal. We need to move from a fossil-fuel based economy to a sustainable economy and that has to be from the top down and from bottom back up again. That is, if we want to sustain life on this planet.

## It’s not the Crimes, It’s Capitalism: The Gulf Oil Spill

*Statement of the Socialist Party USA National Committee*

By now, nearly everyone on the planet is aware of the creeping disaster that is the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Many call the oil spill a crime. People are rightfully outraged and many are calling for criminal prosecution of the British Petroleum Corporation. Many blame the problem on corporations. While it is clear by now that crimes were committed, this is not the issue. The problem isn’t the crimes. The problem is capitalism.

Workers and the environment are perpetually exploited by corporations for profit, but the true nature and functions of corporations must be understood. Corporations are no more than tools of capitalism. While it is important to recognize and disable the tools of exploitation, it’s even more important to recognize who wields those tools: the capitalist class.

Even without these tools, this would still be happening under capitalism. Before there were corporations as we know them, labor was mercilessly exploited (often under deadly conditions), poisons were dumped into the waters, forests were mowed down, and the skies were blackened with industrial waste. Corporations don’t destroy people and the environment; capitalism does.

This is because the capitalist system is a continuous



competition. Capitalists are forced to seek every advantage to make a profit. This, not greed, is the reason why capitalists are forced to crush unions, slash wages, increase hours, cut corners and lower safety. This, not greed, is why the capitalist fights against regulations, and ignores them when he can.

British Petroleum is only one of many corporations that evade basic safety measures. Only a few months ago we saw the deaths of dozens of miners at the Upper Big

*Continued on p12*

## US Hegemony and The Pavlovian Congress - An Interview With Stephen Zunes

*Stephen Zunes is a Professor of Politics and International Studies at the University of San Francisco, where he chairs the program in Middle Eastern Studies. Zunes has been an outspoken critic of Congressional acquiescence to Israeli aggression renaming them the "Pavlovian Congress." He spoke to The Socialist in the weeks following the Israeli commando attack on a humanitarian convoy headed to Gaza.*

**The Socialist:** Give us your thoughts about the disconnect that has developed between American politicians, the Israeli peace movement and the Palestinian freedom movement.

### Stephen Zunes:

One thing that has really struck me is the way that many of the most outstanding liberals in Congress, who have been with the American peace movement on many issues, have essentially betrayed the Israeli peace movement by throwing their support toward the right-wing Israeli government. I remember back in the invasion of Lebanon in 2006, it had come to light that President Bush had goaded Olmert into launching the invasion at

their summit on May 23rd and you had tens of thousands of Israelis protest in Tel Aviv chanting "We will not fight and die for Bush." And yet, you had all these liberal members of Congress supporting this resolution saying, "Oh, yes, you should." All but 15 members of the House voted for that resolution. Most of the progressive caucus, most of the human rights caucus were all lining up in support of this resolution.

There is almost a parallel with Medieval Europe when they used the Jews to be the money lenders and tax collectors and do the dirty work for the ruling class. Essentially, the US has been using Israel to do its dirty work. In this case to cripple Hezbollah and try to curb Iranian influence. If the US had sent troops that were getting killed in the mountains of Lebanon some of these same people would have spoken up. Since Israel is doing it, "Hey, its ok."

My big problem with the broader left in general, is that there tends to be this saying that you are pro-Israel or anti-Israel – people don't appreciate the role that Israel plays in US hegemonic strategy. People say that it is all the fault of the Israel lobby. In fact, if you look at US policy

towards Israel and towards the Middle East, it's remarkably parallel to US policy in Latin America, in Asia. You have to understand US-Israeli relations in the context of US imperialism. Just like you have to do with other foreign policy matters.

**TS:** Would you see Israeli as a kind of client state or as part of an alliance of nations?

**SZ:** In some ways, it is a client state. Which is not to say that they don't have their own interests. But, it is certainly not a tail wagging the dog situation, like some people por-

tray it, because when push does come to shove, whether it is the Suez Crisis in '56 or the AWAC sales to Saudi Arabia, the first Lebanon invasion in '78 under Carter, the loan guarantees under Bush Sr., the Jonathan Pollard case, you can go through a bunch of examples. The Israeli lobby can yell, scream or whatever, but when push comes to shove the President is going to win out.

It's kind of like the China Lobby in the 1960s. People said that the US could

never recognize the People's Republic of China, because the China lobby was so powerful. But, when Kissinger and Nixon decided that for US geo-strategic interest it made sense to recognize reality, and have a rapprochement with the PRC, there wasn't a damn thing the all-powerful China lobby could do about it. They could certainly have made the lives of people who talked about normalization with Beijing miserable before then. There was even an attempt to impeach William O. Douglas, because he thought we should recognize China.

Today, people that challenge Israel will get a lot of flack. But, that's different from saying that they direct the policy.

**TS:** Let me switch and ask you about the media coverage of the attack on the flotilla. Did you see a substantive difference between American media sources and international news sources?

**SZ:** Very much so. The American media pretty much uncritically took the Israeli

*Continued on p13*





## Economic Recovery for the Few by Rick Wolff

Where is this elusive recovery? The banks, some say, have “recovered.” Yet they remain dependent on Washington, they do not make the loans needed for a general recovery, and many medium and small banks keep collapsing. The stock market shows no recovery. The Dow index was 14,000 in late 2007 when capitalism hit the fan, and it is around 10,000 now. The Nasdaq market index was 2800 then and is 2300 now. Everywhere else -- unemployment, foreclosures, bankruptcies, depressed housing market, and so on -- no recovery in sight. Yet, my search finally found genuine recovery for one group, and its recovery offers a better policy to treat this crisis.

Every year, two major companies catering to rich investors co-author a survey of their clients. Capgemini and Merrill Lynch Wealth Management’s World Health Report covers the two groups that interest them: High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs) and Ultra-High Net Worth Individuals (Ultra-HNWIs). The first group counts all individuals with at least \$1 million of “investible assets” in addition to the values of their primary residence, art works, collectibles, etc. The second group includes individuals with at least \$30 million of such investible assets.

Their latest Report, covering the year 2009, finds 10 million HNWIs in the world that year: 3.1 million in North America, while Europe and Asia-Pacific each had 3.0 million. The rest of the world had a mere 0.9 million of the rich and richer.

The 10 million HNWIs -- in a global population of 6.8 billion in 2009 -- amounted to 0.14 per cent of the earth’s people. Together, they owned a total of \$39 trillion in “investible assets.” To see what this means: in 2009, the US GDP (total output of goods and services) was \$14.6 trillion. The combined GDP’s of the world’s 9 richest countries (US, Japan, China, Germany, France, UK, Italy, Russia, and Spain) totaled less in 2009 than the investible assets of the world’s HNWIs.

During 2009, as tens of millions lost their jobs, the number of HNWIs rose by 17.1 per cent and their combined wealth rose by 18.9 per cent. They had a genuine “recovery.” HNWIs regained in wealth most of what they lost in 2008. No wonder they celebrate “recovery” while the rest of the world wonders (or rages at) what they are talking about. In the US, for example, the HNWI population grew by 16.6 per cent in 2009 while the US GDP fell by 2.4 per cent.

Only 1 per cent of all HNWIs were Ultra-HNWIs, but what a group that was and is. Ultra-HNWIs alone owned 35.5 per cent of the \$39 trillion owned by all 10 million HNWIs. And they recovered more during 2009 than their fellow HNWIs.

Capitalism is the name of the global economic system that delivers the outcomes summarized in these numbers. Capitalism produces “recovery” for those who need it least while offering austerity for nearly everyone



else. Today’s business and political leaders tell the people of all advanced industrial countries that there is no alternative to years of government budget austerity (raised taxes and/or reduced government employment and services). They don’t explain that they could tap instead the immense wealth of the richest 0.14 per cent who (a) made huge gains in wealth over the last 25 years, and (b) already recovered in 2009 what they had lost in 2008.

What notions of fairness, decency, ethics, or democracy could justify such economic performance, especially in a time of global economic crisis? Recall as well that these same rich and richer people contributed so significantly (as industrial employers, bankers, and investors) to generating that global economic crisis.

Let’s now concentrate on the HNWIs in just the US (including its Ultra-HNWIs). They numbered 2.9 million in 2009: well under 1 per cent of US citizens. Their investible assets totaled \$12.09 trillion. For 2009, the total US budgetary deficit was \$1.7 trillion. Had the US government levied an economic emergency tax of a modest 15 per cent on only the HNWI’s investible assets, it could have erased its entire 2009 deficit. Over 99 per cent of US citizens would have been exempted from that tax.

The European, Japanese, and other governments could have treated the crisis likewise in their countries. Then governments would not have had to borrow trillions. They would instead have taxed the super rich tiny minority a small portion of its immense wealth. Those governments would not then have had to turn to lenders (often those same super rich). There would be no current “sovereign debt crisis” in Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, etc., and no need for the resulting austerities to satisfy those lenders. Republicans would have no “deficit, deficit” drum to beat hoping for election-day gains.

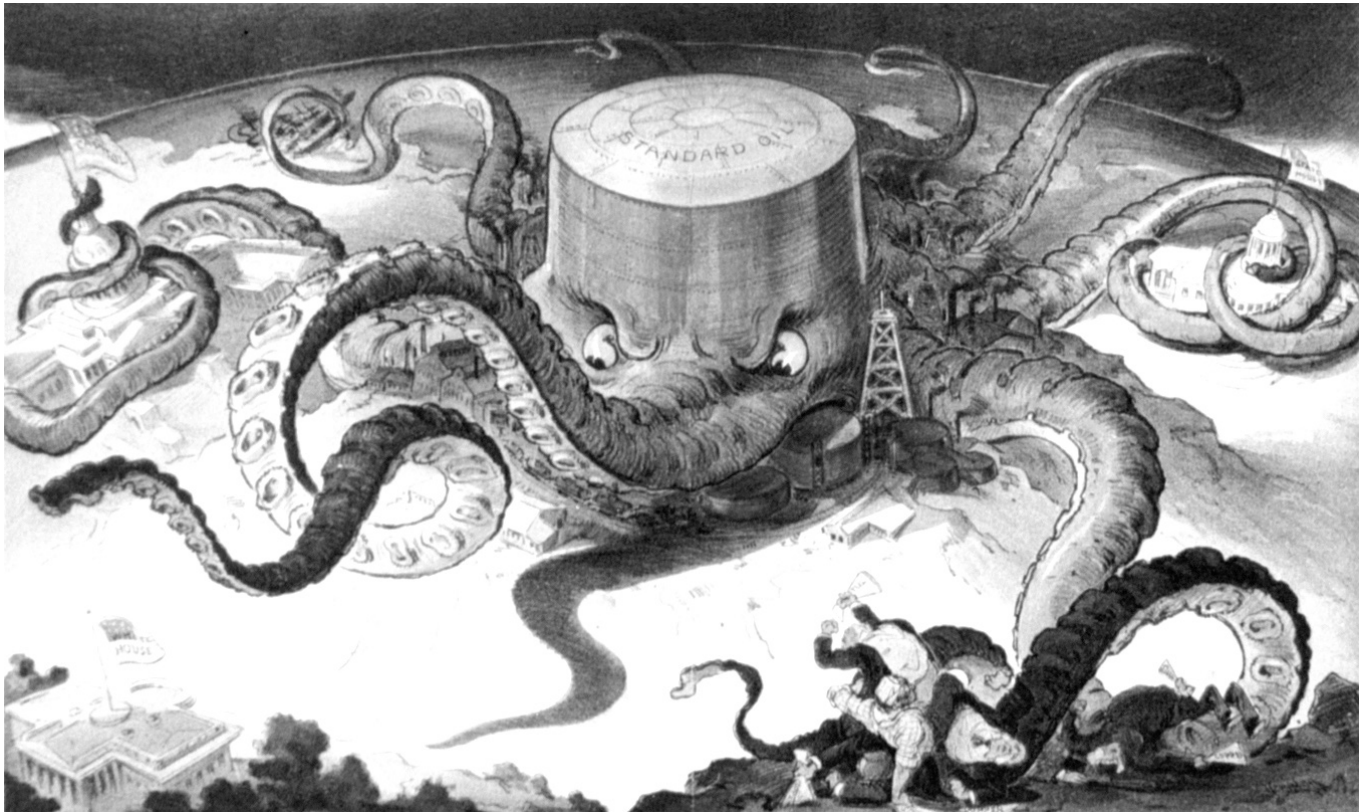
Taxing the HNWIs and Ultra-HNWIs would be the policy of governments responsive

*Continued on p11*



# Capping the Oil Spill at the Center of American Politics

By Dan La Botz



The BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico represents the latest in a series of atrocities committed by petroleum companies against the environment and against humanity. Yet, terrible and tragic as the BP spill is, it is merely a marginal event in the long and sordid history of the oil companies in American and world history. The petroleum companies have been at the center of American politics for a hundred years, determining our domestic agenda, our environmental policy, and our foreign policy. To be an American politician was to be baptized in oil. To be an admiral or a general was to be a warrior around the globe for the petroleum industry.

## Foreign Policy

By the 1920s, with the rise of the internal combustion engine and the automobile and the conversion of the U.S. Navy from coal to oil, petroleum became the most sought after commodity in the world. Oil became a strategic commodity, a necessity of modern life and modern warfare. From that time on, the oil corporations moved to the center of American politics. President Warren G. Harding's cabinet was known as the "oil gang," and the cabinet level corruption involved in the attempt of private parties and corporations to get at the Navy oil reserves led to the Teapot Dome Scandal for which Harding's administration is best remembered.

The U.S. victory in World War II, as much a victory over the declining British and French Empires as it was over Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, allowed America to

displace England and France as the dominant power in the Middle East. The United States became the imperial power shaping and ultimately deciding the affairs in Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. When Mohammad Mosaddegh became Prime Minister of Iran, promising to nationalize BP, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill organized a CIA coup that overthrew Mosaddegh. The coup, organized by Teddy Roosevelt's grandson, Kermit Roosevelt, was the most notorious example of oil, U.S. politics and imperialism in that era.

The U.S. government's foreign policy since then—whether in the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, or Latin America—has largely been driven by the desire to control oil, oil pipelines, and the strategic geopolitical points which made it possible to dominate the world's petroleum centers. The two U.S. wars in Iraq have been principally driven by oil, though, of course, oil wars also expand into regional wars with more complicated motivations and goals within complex international relationships. None of which should keep us from recognizing that oil stands at the center of foreign policy.

## Domestic Policy: The Car

The development of the mass production of the automobile by Henry Ford in 1914, powered by Rockefeller's Standard Oil gasoline (and that of half a dozen other major oil companies), transformed the American economy. The old coal-iron-railroad complex at the center of 19th century

capitalism moved into the background and the steel-rubber-glass-electrical-petroleum constellation pushed into the foreground. The automobile corporations and the oil industry worked to destroy the street cars and inter-urban transportation systems and to create instead a national highway system. The Protestant ethic of acquisitive individualism found perfect expression in the purchase of a car, which became identified with personal freedom and self-expression, from the possibility of moving to the suburbs to sex in the backseat.

After World War II, Eisenhower and Congress created the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways—the Interstates—using the taxpayers' money to provide the infrastructure of the automobile-petroleum industry. The costs of the internal combustion engine became clear by the 1960s: about 40,000 a year killed in collisions every year; environmental damage caused by hydrocarbon fuels; occupational health problems for workers who drive cars and trucks, work in warehouses, or have other long term exposures to automobile fuels and exhaust.

Yet the Big Three auto companies—GM, Ford, and Chrysler—and the Seven Sisters oil companies—Standard Oil of New Jersey and Standard Oil Company of New York (now ExxonMobil); Standard Oil of California, Gulf Oil and Texaco (now Chevron); Royal Dutch Shell; and Anglo-Persian Oil Company (now BP)—proved too powerful to resist. Oil fairly dripped from the U.S. Congress, and Congressmen, their palms greased and their machines well lubricated, voted for cars and gasoline over public transportation and public health.

### Turning Back the Tide of Oil

America's progressive social and labor movements since the early 1900s fought back against the oil industry and its influence on our economy, society, and politics. Ida Tarbell, the teacher and journalist, wrote about the oil trusts for *McClure's* magazine and then produced her great *The History of Standard Oil* (1904), in which she recounted the vicious business practices through which John D. Rockefeller had built the Standard Oil company into a powerful monopoly corporation. And Upton Sinclair, author of *The Jungle*, also wrote the novel *Oil*, published in 1927, based on the Union Oil Company. It was a fictional account of the Teapot Dome scandal.

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) can be said to have inaugurated the modern environmental movement. Her pioneering book described the way that pesticides entered into our water and soil, our plants and animals, and into our own food. Though she doesn't discuss the petroleum industry, petroleum products formed the basis for the post-war industry of synthetic pesticides. Later, environmentalists would go directly after the oil companies for the pollution involved in every phase of the industry from exploration and perforation, to pumping and refining, to combustion and exhaust.

During the period of the 1960s and 1970s, Tony Mazzocchi, a leader of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW), played a central role in fighting the oil

companies not only over wages, benefits and conditions, but also over health and safety and environmental issues. Mazzocchi, his union and other labor allies, were the moving force behind the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) in 1970. He also chaired the New York City Earth Day in that same year and was a founder of Labor for Peace two years later. In 1996, Mazzocchi went on to organize the U.S. Labor Party, believing that workers could not rely on the Republicans and Democrats and needed their own party.

### Continuing the Fight, Providing an Alternative

Today, we in the Socialist Party continue the fight to bring the U.S. oil companies under control. While we certainly support greater regulation of this industry—both economic regulation and regulation of all aspects of production and distribution—we recognize that oil is both too valuable and too dangerous to be allowed to continue in private hands. We need to make oil and our other national resources part of our national legacy, the collective property of the American people, not the private property of wealthy investors. At the same time, we need to begin to dramatically reduce the role of oil in our national economy, turning from coal and petroleum with their dangerous hydrocarbons, to solar energy, wind, and hydrothermal alternatives.

Turning back the oil tide will involve education, organization and class struggle. We need to continue to be an active part of the environmental movement that has played a leading role in opposing the oil industry. At the same time, we need to develop a program to speak to coal and oil workers about the need to transform the industries in which they work, while taking steps to protect their jobs and futures. While supporting reforms and regulation, we need, as socialists, to be raising the idea of the socialization of oil within the context of a national economic plan and a democratic socialist society.

Oil and the petroleum industry's profits stand at the center of the American economy, society and polity. We need to push the oil industry aside and put working people and their needs—for jobs, health care, education, and social well being at the center. We can do it by building the movements against war, to save the environment, and to create a full-employment economy that pays a living wage. We need a political expression of that movement, a working people's party as an alternative to the corporate parties. And we can do it with your help and commitment to social change and democracy.

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*Dan LaBotz is the Socialist Party USA candidate for Senate in Ohio. Find out more about the campaign at [danlabotz.com](http://danlabotz.com)*





## Worker Self-Management in Thailand: Micro-spaces of Mutual Aid and Class Resistance

### Bill Templer

*Particularly significant by the mid-30s were the sitdown strikes, that's just one step short of workers taking over factories, eliminating management and ownership, and radically changing the society. These are ideas that ought to be very much alive today, and if they're not, that's the fault of today's critical intellectuals, among others. —Noam Chomsky (2010)*

Noam is right: these ideas ought to be very much alive and churning today. And they are springing to new life in many corners of the laboring world, among oppressed workers from Argentina to Thailand. They flashed briefly in the US in December 2008, when over 200 workers at Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago occupied their factory for eight days after owners gave them three days notice that the plant would be shut down (Newman, 2008). The sitdown spawned short-lived solidarity, and protests against Bank of America across the country. This was a people's protest against the "Robin Hood State," which takes from the poor to bail out the rich in the surging planetary war on the workers.

Kari Lydersen's book, *Revolt on Goose Island* (2009), on the Republic Windows sitdown sketches a vision of how that example might fire worker activism in the coming decade of deepening economic crisis in American capitalism. Ever more, workers are leaving the mental 'State of Denial' that is 'eyes wide shut and business as usual' as that war intensifies.

### Upping the Ante of Workers' Control

The question for socialists in North America is how to create genuine, sustainable democratic worker-run enterprises, by coop initiative and people's expropriation. This has been going on in Argentina for more than a decade, in horizontalidad politics (Sitrin, 2006) and factory and hotel takeovers. The Lavaca collective's book, *Sin Patron* (2007), with narratives from Argentina's worker-run factories gives voice to the people involved. Stateside, socialists can learn from it, and from Estaban Magnani's (2009) first-hand analysis on recovered businesses in Argentina. But, let's look at another example from Southeast Asia.

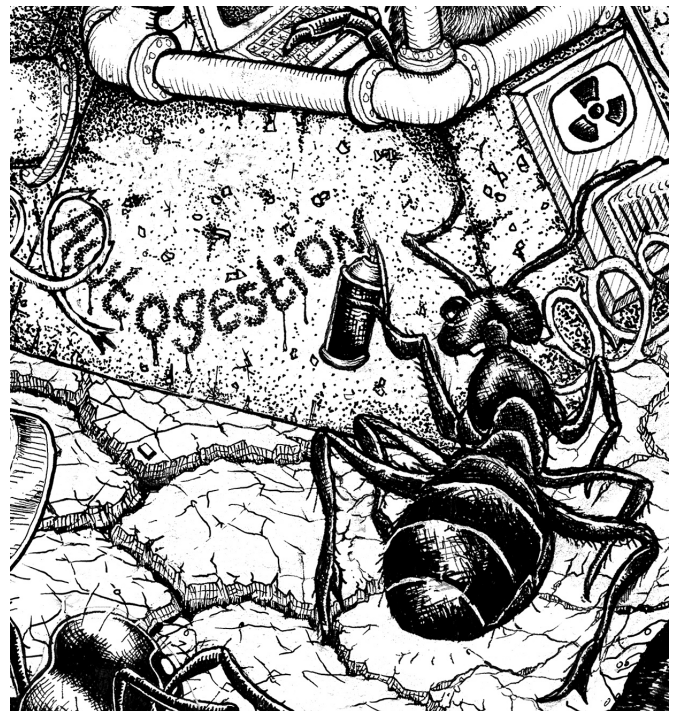
### Thai Autogestion Ouvrière: A Micro-Space of Worker Self-Management

Lesser known are the Thai worker-run textile factories, and the tough working women who have taken them over. A small, militant example is Try Arm, a worker-run textile plant in the heart of Bangkok. A year ago, Body Fashion Thailand, a local arm of the Swiss global textile giant Triumph International, laid off nearly 2,000 workers at a plant 29 km south of Bangkok.

The workers, mainly women, many single mothers, demanded severance pay, which was refused. They protested outside the Swiss Embassy in Bangkok, and then, in October, some 500 workers broke into the Thai Labor Ministry compound and set up camp, turning the ministry's ground

floor into a small textile plant. They have since been given a factory space in central Bangkok, where about 30 women are working, running their own Try Arm factory. All of Try Arm's personnel are either single mothers or married to minimum wage workers. Try Arm now has 15 sewing machines and a cutting machine, thanks to some government help, but works wonders in producing top quality undergarments. Try Arm is a play on the brand name Triumph, and sounds similar to 'Triumph' in Thai pronunciation. But with a mind to English and the word 'arm,' its logo is a clenched fist.

The protest by laid-off Triumph workers outside the Labor Ministry in Bangkok went on from June 2009 until last February, when the Thai government agreed to help with



bank loans and sewing machines. Students were also in open solidarity with the action

It reflects the huge gap between rich and poor in Thailand --- extreme inequality that erupted in the Red Shirt insurgency in March this year in Bangkok. Yet the takeover at Try Arm is a different kind of space, a genuine working-class militant response to the global class war from above. The Red Shirt (seua daeng) rebellion March-May 2010, by contrast, was heavily manipulated in its major phase by a crony leadership tied to the absconded telecoms mogul and former populist prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Thailand's Berlusconi. Some of the women at the Try Arm plant were in strong solidarity with the Red Shirt siege of Bangkok, an action largely by impoverished agrarian workers from the Thai Isaan (Northeast). Yet at Try Arm they continued in turmoil's midst to work at their own self-run

*Continued on p12*



to the needs of their working-class majorities instead of their rich and super-rich patrons. Austerity is not the only policy. Modestly taxing the wealth of HNWIs is the far better policy choice. The two wealth management companies that cater to HNWIs have kindly provided us all with the facts and figures needed to support the better policy.

Across Europe, coalitions of trade unions, socialist, communist, and some green parties, and many social, religious, and community organizations are organizing growing mass demonstrations and general strikes. These oppose austerity and demand alternative ways to deal with economic crisis. In France, mobilization focuses on a nationwide general strike September 7. Plans are underway for an all-European day of public actions on September 29. National actions like this have already happened in Greece, Portugal, and other countries.

The business and political leaders generated by the last 30 years of neoliberal capitalism simply assumed that they could impose the costs of their crisis on their countries' people. That assumption is now being contested. The European people are beginning to fight back. And here, in the US?

\*\*\*

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*Beyond Petrol*  
by JLH (Jesse Lokahi Heiwa)

*Oil covered Gulf*  
*Peoples Livelihoods Destroyed*  
*Push Back BP Greed*



*BP & The Workers - continued from p3*

of April and May of this year alone. It is commonly accepted that when someone (usually a poor person) shoots and kills another person they have committed murder and must be punished accordingly. Yet, when an executive or manager cuts safety standards leading to a worker's death the most they face is a fine.

The shooter is guilty of murder because they harmed the person on purpose. Yet, despite the difference of intent, knowingly, or even recklessly, endangering a workers life is still intentional. While the shooter intends to harm one

person once, the executive knowingly endangers the lives of hundreds of people every day, year after year. In his book *And The Poor Get Prison...* Jeffrey Reiman says that these acts "are surely precisely the kind of harmful actions from which a criminal justice system...ought to protect us. They are crimes by another name." (Reiman, 1996, pp. 65)

Yet, BP, as expected, is, at most, facing criminal fines. Murder charges are out of the question. Indicting a BP executive for murder would raise questions about the entire capitalist system. In capitalism, corporations must always seek to maximize profits on pain of going out of business - this means speed-ups and cutting corners on safety standards. As we have seen, this inevitably means that workers will be killed and, in the case of BP and others, that entire ecosystems will be put in jeopardy.

Capitalism is a mode of production that systematically commits acts of murder against the working class. We cannot wait for lawmakers to recognize the crimes of capitalism as crimes. The fundamental structure of law in capitalist society allows these abuses to continue. However, workers can defend themselves by forming unions. Through unions, we can force bosses to accept working conditions that are compatible with worker health and safety. As workers, and as human beings, we also cannot let these crimes go unpunished. We must demand that these murderers be tried for their crimes.

Until the system as a whole changes, there will be many more BP's. As the clean up workers toil to fix BP's mess, they face dangers and health risks much like the workers on the rig. The clean up workers, working in a "toxic sludge," have not been given the proper training or safety equipment. Past experiences with oil clean up, such as the Exxon Valdez, have shown that exposure to crude oil leads to chronic health problems, such as respiratory diseases. So, even after the massive oil explosion, BP is showing more concern for their bottom line than the lives of workers. How many workers need to get sick, need to die, before we realize that this system must be done away with? It is time that we fought back. Capitalism itself is a crime.

\*\*\*

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facility in the city's heart --- a tiny but genuine expression of authentic worker response to the machinations of Thai capital and its plutocracy. Women make up about 90 percent of Thailand's export-oriented workforce, and many plants for textiles have been hard-hit by the global downturn. So, worker fury is mounting.

Although Try Arm turns out a product line of panties and other undergarments similar to Triumph's, its now 30 workers make only 250 baht (= \$8) a day, 30% less than they made at the big lingerie plant that was shut down. But they have their dignity, their spirit and grit. And they're running the show, learning the ropes of how to operate without a boss, and finding customers, making sales.

Try Arm turns out some 200 pieces of underwear a day, sold directly to shop visitors or taken to markets, and also exports to Europe on a per-order basis. Maybe someone state-side can contact them for orders to the US. These are quality undergarments at a fair price. Lend them a hand.

### **Dignity Returns**

Another Thai worker-run factory, turning out the Dignity Returns textile brand, an earlier (2003) prototype for worker self-management, is in some ways a precursor of Try Arm, is still going strong seven years later. A recent video produced by the working class NGO Thailand Labour Campaign on the Solidarity Factory, with English subtitles, tells their story in a very powerful way.

These initiatives represent a shop-floor alternative pathway, grounded on smallness of scale, local action, courage, grassroots mutualism and a hunger for workers' dignity. That can help generate a concrete alternative space for a different, people-run, economy and self-managed commonwealth. Socialists need to spur such bottom-up initiatives where they can.

These are tiny bold seeds of a Great Transition already germinating within the vortex of unending crises of capital, climate, energy and system collapse swirling around us. Look at these small experiments in autogestion ouvrière, self-management and mutual aid. Discuss them with working families, ordinary Americans. You may, in Virginia's Woolf's words, sense that "I have grasped a plank in the sea."

Empirical research is needed on the extent to which such experiments in self-management concretely embody anarcho-socialist principles, as suggested by *An Anarchist FAQ* (2008): "Self-management means the end of hierarchy and authoritarian social relationships in the workplace and their replacement by free agreement, collective decision-making, direct democracy, social equality and libertarian social relationships." This seems in many ways to be happening at Try Arm and Dignity Returns in Bangkok, transforming workers' sense of self and community.

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### *It's Not the Crimes - continued from p5*

Branch mine for the same reasons. On the Deepwater Horizon, eleven workers were killed, seventeen injured. While this disaster never should have occurred, under capitalism, these disasters are inevitable.

The supply of energy in all its forms is held hostage to a system that must put profits above everything. Held hostage by corporations, Congress betrayed the public by capping damages arising from environmental catastrophes. Government regulators are held hostage to by capitalism, betraying the by looking the other way or even aiding the capitalists.

The Socialist Party USA calls for the immediate socialization of all energy companies and the creation of a publically owned entity that can meet energy requirements while being operated under community and worker control. These corporations should be transferred to the public sector without compensation. Because of the inherent danger in deep water drilling, the SPUSA calls for the total ban on offshore exploration, drilling, and for immediately phasing out of existing off shore wells.

The United States must reverse its dependence on oil and gas. The SPUSA calls for free mass transit and a massive program to greatly expand light rail in urban areas and build a network of inter-city fast rail. Electrical energy needs should be met through the use of renewable resources such as wind and ocean power.

The oil spill is indicative of the necessary disregard of human life and our environment that is fundamental to the capitalist market economy. Efforts to tinker with this system, attempting to regulate capitalism, are bound to fail. Only the abolition of the for-profit, market system and its replacement with a democratic, socialist society can prevent more catastrophic ecological disasters.

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*Zunes Interview - continued from p6*

version of events. They portrayed their heavily edited video tape over and over again – without mentioning that the Israelis had confiscated everyone else's. By the time the handful of evidence was released, the news cycle had moved on. Pretty classic.

Of course, it didn't help that you had some of the most prominent liberals in Congress defending the Israeli attack as an act of self-defense. Brad Sherman, the head of the Foreign Affairs Committee, called for prosecuting the peace activists on terrorism charges. Of course, in the media, if you want two sides of the story, it's the Democrats and Republicans. They are all singing the same tune. Where's the debate?

**TS:** Do you see some conceptual or political links between the Bush notion of "pre-emptive war" and the way in which the Israelis are presenting the attack on the flotilla as self-defense?

**SZ:** It comes with the whole idea that if you are fighting terrorism everything you do is, by definition, self-defense. International humanitarian law, international maritime law and whatever else is out the window. It's amazing if you look at the Flotilla attack or even Congressional resolutions on Lebanon or Gaza, they claim this is all legitimate under Article 51 of the UN Charter. Anyone that knows anything about the UN Charter knows that's bullshit.

What's so strange when you look at the Bush pre-emptive war thing, is that you can see how some Democratic Hawks and Republicans could make that linkage. What gets me upset is that the people who opposed the Iraq war, who questioned the legality of the Iraq war, would turn around and defend the legality of the Israeli actions. One would think that if you recognize that killing a lot of civilians and invading and occupying Arab lands is both illegal and hurting your security, instead of advancing it, and creating more terrorists than it kills. You would think that they would recognize the same thing would apply to Israel as well.

**TS:** You mention the UN. I wonder if you can imagine another UN or another role for the UN than the one it's currently playing, which, particularly in the Middle East, doesn't seem to be very effective.

**SZ:** Well, as long as the Security Council is the only vehicle through which the UN can really enforce international law and given that the US has veto power and has used it on more than 40 occasions to block resolutions critical to Israel and our threat of a veto has been used to block many more and has prevented any of the resolutions on Israel that have passed from being under Chapter 7, meaning that they are enforceable, it's really hard to see. At the same time, I'd quickly add that the United States, along with France, has prevented the UN from acting on the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara for years and the British and Americans prevented action on East Timor, so the inability of the UN to

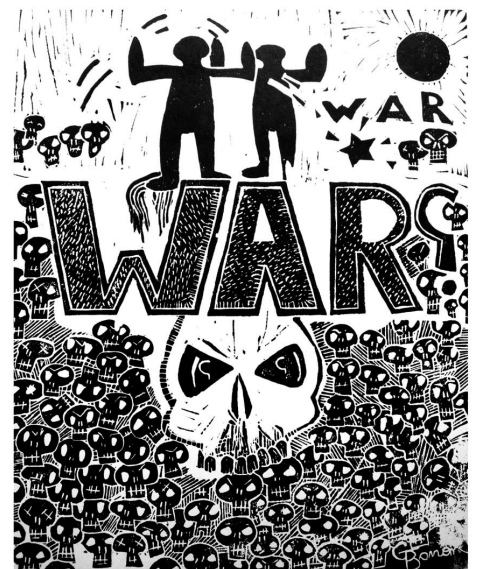
act, even on clear cut cases of oppression, of invasion and occupation, failure to withdraw and grant self determination as declared by the UN and UN Charter, are blocked by a veto or threat of a veto. This is not unique to Israel and Palestine unfortunately.

**TS:** Can you tell us how you think a withdrawal from Afghanistan might work? And also, if you can, make a comment on how you think the recent discovery of Lithium and other mineral reserves changes the outlook for peace or long term prospects in the region.

**SZ:** I'm a little suspicious about the timing of the announcement. I think there was a pretty good idea of this for some time. I think the most realistic scenario for withdrawal would be to try to forge a genuinely broad coalition government, to try to pressure the Karzai regime to clean up its act and to put a lot more emphasis on sustainable development from the grassroots. The key thing would be to strengthen civil society within Afghanistan and I think that, more realistically, should be the role of NGO's, not the US government. I know a fair number of Afghan-Americans who have close ties to their country still. What I keep hearing from them is they don't want the Americans to pull out all together, but they think the surge is a really bad idea. They think the over emphasis on the military side of the equation is just making things worse and that we need to find ways of strengthening civil society instead of what we have been doing, which strengthens war lords and opium magnates and corrupt officials.

**TS:** There's not a very good political record for economies that are based on resource extraction.

**SZ:** Exactly, there are all these millions of dollars of mineral wealth that's accessible, but what are the odds of it actually getting to the grassroots to develop society so they won't turn to the Taliban. They know darn well what's going to happen. It's going to get into the hands of the same people who are screwing things up now and multi-national corporations and it's gonna suck the wealth out of the country if it's anything like other mineral wealthy societies in that part of the world.





# What We're Reading

## Lawrence Rockwood

*A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism*, Silvio Pon and Robert Service (eds): New Jersey: Princeton, 944 pages, 2010

*A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism* is an encyclopedic reference of “actually existing socialism” dominated by the historical experience of the Soviet Union and its European satellites. There is certainly a European flavor to the work as evidenced by the fact that the more than 400 entries are authored by 160 academics, 120 of whom are associated with European academic institutions. However, for socialists, this base of knowledge of the historical legacy of the most important revolutionary event in the 20th century, the Russian Revolution of 1917, is indispensable. The editors credit the opening of archives in former communist states and the subsequent new materials available to scholars for the first time as the inspiration for their project.

## John Pietaro

*FDR and the New Deal for Beginners* by Paul Buhle and Sabrina Jones Afterword by Harvey Pekar, *For Beginners Books*, 160 pages, 2010

Authoring the latest release of the “For Beginners” series, Paul Buhle’s collaboration with underground comic artist Sabrina Jones brings the New Deal’s politics and radicalism to life at a profound time. We find the back story to Roosevelt’s rise and his ideological awakening, the incalculable importance of First Lady Eleanor’s role, the revolutionary struggles which helped to forge the New Deal, and the breadth of that platform’s reach.

## Maggie Phair

*Apocalypse Never, Forging a Path to a Nuclear Weapon-Free World* by Tad Daley, Rutgers University Press, 288 pages, 2010

The main proposal by Tad Daley is for permanent and total abolition of nuclear weapons in all countries. Daley proposes a mighty new movement for nuclear abolition. He emphasizes the need to set a deadline for abolition - for instance, August 6, 2020. Abolition will require a convention to revise the NPT into a Nuclear Weapons Elimination Convention. Enough people must work to establish a universal, verifiable, and enforceable convention to get rid of nuclear weapons. Forever.

## Will Shapira

*The American Way of War: How Bush’s Wars Became Obama’s* by Tom Engelhardt Haymarket Books 269 pages, 2010

Is it any wonder that the millions who voted in Barack Obama as president in 2008 did so largely on his implied, if not overtly stated, promise to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (and now Pakistan, too) and are now mad as hell that the “new” president has turned out to be another war

president? Will peaceniks shun the Dems and either go for a third party or sit out the 2012 election? Mr. Engelhardt is a shrewd observer of the world and Washington politics and you will find his observations and analyses among the most trenchant of those covering the political scene.

*The War Comes Home: Washington’s Battle Against America’s Veterans*, by Aaron Glantz, University of California Press, 254 pages, 2010  
Aaron Glantz, a journalist who covered the war in Iraq, lays out a game plan for vets,

their families and other loved ones to try to ensure veterans receive every bit of assistance they need and to which they are entitled. He also offers ideas on how to deal with problems of veterans resuming family life, education, homelessness, chemical dependency, suicide, reintegration into the workforce and more. Gantz writes that “The entire approach of the government has not been to help veterans, but to make the benefits of service seem attractive to soldiers when they enlist, while extracting as little money as possible from the federal treasury.” Our tax dollars, mis-used and unused.

## Billy Wharton

*Uses of a Whirlwind: Movement, Movements, and Contemporary Radical Currents in the United States*, 2010, Team Colors Collective AK Press, 420 pages

You can call the Team Colors Collective’s new book *Uses of a Whirlwind* (2010, AK Press) a useful summary of the time in between large movements where activists and intellectuals search for a new path. The whirlwind metaphor fits well, since the book sweeps away both the notion that 60s-style radicalism can be re-born, while arguing that the anti-globalization movement of the turn of the century has also been transcended. What’s left are questions, interesting ones, that speak in a hopeful manner about creating new outlets for transformative politics. The book features chapters written by grassroots activists and intellectuals and includes several useful exchanges between the them.



But, something strange happened in all of this. After donating \$70,000 to Federal candidates since 2009, BP's campaign payoff money dried up. Once the light of public scrutiny appeared, BP ran for the exits. Politicians, especially those who had already feasted, made public declarations that they would return any check cut by the rogue energy giant. At least in the short term, one part of the tether than links corporate America to the political class was severed.

This is not to say that the US government declared its independence from the energy sector. Nor, even that they will get serious about regulation. But, that two observations may be made by returning to the idea presented by Marx and Engels. We can say that the modern state is not just an entity that manages "...the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie." This duty or relationship is not automatic, but requires the outlay of some amount of resources on the part of corporations. The process itself causes changes in the structure and function of both the state and private corporations.

Second, the key element that the state attempts to manage for economic elites, in an ostensibly democratic society, is public opinion, or mass sentiment or even people's "common sense." Making sure that ideas about the public ownership of vital resources are defeated is as essential as granting waivers to allow energy companies to self-regulate. And equally as dangerous.

Understanding how this link between the state and corporations operates is critical to opening the possibility that fueled the work of Marx and Engels in the 19th century. That one day the majority of the "managed" population might realize its own power and put an end to the incestuous connection between the state and economic elites. The links between oil and politics explored in this edition of *The Socialist* share a similar aim.

We intend to discover and expose the weak points in the relationship between economic elites and state. We do so, in order to suggest that regular people can and should exercise the kind of radical democracy necessary to save our planet, reclaim the wealth we create with our labor and open new age of peaceful global relations. In short, we think democratic socialism offers a way out of the cycle of politics where campaign contributions matter more than the public interest.

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#### *Nationalize 'Em - Continued from p4*

much doubt or disagreement about their greed and disregard for the national good. There is a certain arrogance coming from the petroleum boardrooms which seems to be saying, "Oh, yeah? What are you going to do about it?"

After all, when the Federal Trade Commission under George W. Bush permitted mergers, which allowed the largest oil companies to get even larger (ExxonMobil, Conoco-Phillips, Texaco-Shell, BP-Amoco, Valero-Shamrock etc.), it was rather clear that the stranglehold grip of oil on America would only get tighter. It's like a macabre

family reunion of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil. The basic lesson of history is that there was a good reason why Standard Oil was busted up. While certainly no panacea, an immediate plan of nationalization, perhaps administered congressionally, will reel in all of the petroleum giants.

Nationalize 'em. That's what we think we should do about it. We, as a nation, need to let the oil companies know that we are in charge.

There are many good reasons to nationalize the energy industry. Instead of having Big Coal compete with Big Oil and Big Nuclear, and all of them trying to strangle alternative energy like wind and solar, we could have a comprehensive energy policy which would reduce the dependence on Big Foreign Oil and fossil fuels altogether, all the while graduating towards renewable energy sources. We would be able to regulate gasoline and heating oil prices; equally distribute supplies nationwide; reduce gasoline prices at the pumps. We would be able to increase fuel efficiency standards; we would ensure the construction of new refinery capacity. We would be able to sustain viable employment in the energy industry, especially with new construction oriented to more energy efficient and alternative sources. We would further ensure the safety and health of our working people; and we would make sure that there would be no more Deep Well drilling accidents in the Gulf of Mexico. It might even get us out of that oil war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and keep us from getting into another oil war in Iran or Venezuela.

Basically, we would be able to regulate and ensure supply, distribution, production, importation and work towards efficient energy consumption.

Obviously, there are plenty of details to be worked out, but the main thing is to recognize that unless there is some sort of immediate central oversight over the oil cartels, there will be nothing but more problems in the economy, in the environment and in the survival of most Americans and the world.

So call it what you want--nationalization, socialization...but recognize that it needs to be done. When they are done wiping off those oil-soaked pelicans in the Gulf, nationalization might not seem like such a dirty word.

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