

Issue Overview: Structures of Power and Inequality

Editors

THIS ISSUE OF *SOCIAL JUSTICE* HAS A DUAL, BUT RELATED FOCUS: STRUCTURAL forces in the form of dominance based on race and gender within the U.S. and the integrative mechanisms operating at the hemispheric and global levels that reproduce global poverty and North-South disparities. This ensemble of forces conditions the tasks facing communities of resistance. In a period of apparent setbacks, contributors to this issue offer glimmers of hope and modest policy proposals that could help advance an agenda for promoting racial equality, reducing interethnic conflict and violence against women, and beginning to visualize a notion of civil society at a hemispheric level.

In “‘The Land That Never Has Been Yet’: U.S. Race Relations at the Crossroads,” Anthony M. Platt places the struggle for racial equality in historical perspective from the point of view of people of color. Given recent setbacks, he asks whether we are returning to the days of “separate but equal,” or a formal system of white supremacy. Making effective use of personal experience in the narrative, the author traces the hubris of the Civil Rights Movement and the initial gains of reforms based on affirmative action policies, through the reversals stemming from the backlash of the last 25 years that propel us toward a logic of living with inequality. The article traces the current hostile economic conditions facing people of color, the reversal of hard-won gains in the educational arena, and the changing racial demographics leading into the next millennium that present a major challenge for an anti-racist movement. The task facing such a movement is daunting: it must encompass a complicated array of social, economic, cultural, and identity constituencies and address the cultural hybridity that typifies our increasingly interdependent, mobile world. Platt argues that despite the obstacles, we must not retreat from affirmative action and the principles of racial equality, for the more we concede, the more they will take. Inviting controversy, he asserts that “multiculturalism,” with its respect for difference and uniqueness, typically accepts the basic premises of segregation and apartness and then calls on us to revisit the issue of integration (as opposed to assimilation). Minimally, we must reconnect the relationship between culture, power, and economic structures.

In “Organizing in Communities of Color: Addressing Inter-Ethnic Conflicts,” Margo Okazawa-Rey and Marshall Wong examine the underlying struc-

tural factors causing the inter-ethnic conflicts immortalized in images of armed Korean merchants defending their stores against angry African-American looters in South-Central Los Angeles in 1992. The rapid growth of immigrant Asian, primarily Korean businesses in predominantly Black neighborhoods, has created an explosive situation fraught with misconceptions and prejudices. The authors distinguish “inter-ethnic conflict” — racial and cultural tensions and conflicts between communities of color — from “racism” in the form of institutionalized white racism. The article examines the history of exclusionary U.S. immigration laws and various factors such as capital and class formation, levels of education, and entry points into U.S. society that affect the roles and perceptions of the groups in these communities. A case study of the Afro-Asian Relations Council of Washington, D.C., provides the experiential base for discussing new approaches. Too often well-meaning efforts to break down walls between peoples of color fail to address underlying structural factors or to encompass the complex issues of community control, economic development, and assimilation of new immigrants. If communities of color are able to resolve conflicts and galvanize their forces, the prospect arises of establishing a formidable power block with which oppressive structures may be transformed into structures that promote and support the development of healthy, whole individuals and communities, of all races and cultures.

“Singapore West: The Incarceration of 200,000 Californians,” by Mark Koetting and Vincent Schiraldi, documents the highest ever rate of incarceration for the State of California. Its system of prisons and jails locks up more people — as a percentage of the general population — than any other *nation* in the world. Moreover, African Americans in California are imprisoned at nine times the rate of whites. Although African Americans constitute under seven percent of the state’s total population, they make up 32% of prison inmates. Similarly, though Latinos account for 24% of the state’s total population, they make up 34% of the CDC’s population. If these two groups were imprisoned at the rate of whites, the CDC’s total population would be *less than half its current number*. California’s incarceration and crime rates, both of which have risen dramatically in recent years, are contrasted with the rates of many nations throughout the world. The data suggest that if California were a nation, it would lead the world in both categories. The authors’ review of the data suggests that there is no necessary link between a higher rate of incarceration and a lower rate of crime. Indeed, the prodigious expansion of the state’s correctional system has yielded a negligible impact on crime, especially violent crime. Specific policy recommendations urging the implementation of a more effective and less expensive crime control strategy are presented.

According to Neil Websdale and Byron Johnson, the authors of “Reducing Woman Battering: The Role of Structural Approaches,” intrafamilial violence directed against women is part of a set of structural relations and social practices

that allow men to dominate, oppress, and exploit women. At its heart are the intersecting power relations of gender and class. The authors' case study of the Kentucky Job Readiness Program between 1990 and 1994 reveals that woman battering must not be seen astructurally as a criminal justice problem (with the usual emphasis on mandatory arrest), but rather structurally as an economic, public health, labor, housing, human rights, and educational issue. The article convincingly argues that structural interventions (especially providing independent housing and employment, but also helping with transportation, etc.) reduce revictimization in cases of domestic violence, with the implication that much more funding should be made available for such preventive programs. Beyond these steps, however, if the power imbalance between men and women in abusive relationships can be effectively altered and revictimization subsequently reduced, then by moving toward equality for women in their relationships with men, could we not also lower the outbreak of woman battering in the first place?

The next article analyzes the effect of macroeconomic factors and policing on the pattern of drug arrests for women. The general thesis of Joan Hoffman's "Macroeconomic Indicators and New York City Women's Drug Arrests" is that the deterioration of economic opportunity in the legal economy increases economic activity in the illegal drug economy, resulting in a rise in drug arrest rates. The author finds that the economic disentanglement of women with low skills has a significant impact on New York City women's illegal drug arrest rates. Indicators of both absolute and relative deprivation, including racial inequality, are significant. The powerful economic transformations of the U.S. economy beginning in the 1960s — which exacerbated structural inequalities of class, race, and gender — have had a cumulative impact on minority women, who were especially unprepared for this shift. The author reports that over 90% of the women in New York City prisons are minorities, supporting the argument that minority women are disproportionately represented among those arrested. The results of Dr. Hoffman's study strongly suggest that reskilling the population is vital to an anticrime program. In short, helping low-skill women adjust to the structural changes in the economy is a necessary part of any program designed to alleviate illegal drug crime. It is also argued that the high costs of imprisonment limit the nation's ability to meet the challenges of economic restructuring. As such, increasing the marketable skills of the poor is an investment in economic transformation.

Moving from the national to the international arena, William Felice's essay on the role of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) and the World Bank at the U.N.'s World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen deals with key issues concerning the future of humanity and the planet. Overcoming obstacles to eradicating poverty worldwide, including compelling key international actors to commit to doing so, was the central focus. The essay draws out the connections between globalization, neoliberalism, and increasing poverty in terms of the

World Bank's promotion of economic growth and the market, the informal economy, and its opposition to improved labor standards. World Bank policies, which tended to dominate the Summit, obstruct structural change and too quickly set aside human rights in the name of economic growth. The NGOs rejected that model and called on the Summit to address the structural causes of poverty, unemployment, social disintegration, and environmental degradation. Certain questions on attaining global humane governance arise: Can NGOs bring about substantial change at the local level without elaborating a universal model, e.g., without exploring alternatives to capitalism as a global system? Can the system be transformed, or must it be replaced? Can and should "globalization-from-below" counter capital's "globalization-from-above"? What is the best forum for discussing structural questions? A related academic conference identified the global social disintegration plaguing developed and developing nations and called on the world community to address the impact of globalization, the decline in social cohesion, and the social costs of modernization. In this light, the ways in which the economic forces of globalization are destructive to civil society were analyzed, as were the roles of the market and nation-states.

"Continental Integration and Civil Society in the Americas," by Andre C. Drainville, provides a sophisticated and well-grounded treatment of questions of great sociopolitical import for the Lefts and progressive forces of the Americas. Specifically, it addresses the relationship between regional economic integration, the "New World Order" projects, and the potential formation of regional and global antisystemic movements. A prevalent theme in the literature on global and hemispheric integration concerns a varied collection of ostensibly internationalist social forces (transnational capital, institutions of global governance, new social movements, and nongovernmental organizations), who imagine themselves to be at the center of a global history in the making. They take for granted that the world order of capital has already created a global civil society, ushering in the need to think of democracy in cosmopolitan terms. Drainville critically examines such claims as well as the effect of continentalization programs on these sociopolitical forces. Hemispheric integration in the Americas, it is argued, involves constructing a regional foothold for disciplining accumulation in the world economy and addressing its political organization, especially the changing needs of U.S. foreign policy in a post-hegemonic period.

Social movements should be wary of plans for a global social order centered on an ostensibly emerging transnational civil society. If the occasional campaigns organized by national coalitions (such as those formed in opposition to the Free Trade Area of the Americas or NAFTA) develop into concerted strategic planning, and if social movements grow into continent-wide resistance communities, the compliant civil society envisioned by state-led and market-based integration efforts could produce a contradictory result. Since transnational civil society, in the Americas and in the world economy, is anything but a finished

product, attempts to negotiate codes of conduct on behalf of a humanity that does not exist politically risk arresting its development and curtailing its radical potential.

“The NAFTA Agreement and U.S. Labor Discrimination,” by Catherine Connolly and Julie Tennant-Burt, is a research note that assesses the labor provisions of this trilateral trade agreement, with implications for labor policy under Clinton. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) provides for the elimination of all tariffs on goods originating in Mexico, Canada, and the United States and resulted in the creation of a total market encompassing 370 million people and \$6.5 trillion worth of goods. Analyzed here are the procedures established to resolve labor disputes, the status of the economies and labor disputes in the member nations, and the potential use of U.S. anti-discrimination law in conjunction with the labor provisions to alleviate worker grievances stemming from allegations of sex discrimination in the United States or involving U.S. companies. Not surprisingly, the promises made in the agreement’s preamble, such as the resolution to create new employment opportunities and to improve working conditions and living standards, appear to be illusory. There are no mechanisms for evaluating whether the goals regarding worker-related human rights are met and the language on worker rights is predominantly symbolic. In addition, U.S. anti-employment-discrimination law has not been very successful extraterritorily and does not address issues related to occupational segregation. The authors conclude that not only does the NAFTA Labor Agreement do little to enhance the lives of the workers employed in the trade-related industries of its member nations, it also appears that workers, who are predominantly female, are being fired for union organizing activities.

Finally, we return to a topic of continuing relevance in the Americas, South Africa, and Eastern Europe: the tension between reconciliation and justice during the transition to democratic rule. Previous issues (19:1, 19:4) have focused on how a policy of impunity to former regimes guilty of massive abuses of state power is itself a form of institutionalized crime and can breed corruption of the justice system. In “Resurrection of Victims” in this issue, Dragan Petrovec takes the view that vesting the victims of such abuses with state power, at least in newly emerging countries of the former Yugoslavia such as Slovenia, as well as in the former one-party Communist states in general, can also have ill effects from the standpoint of justice and crime policy. True victims — people with the courage to come out publicly with social and political beliefs that ran counter to the official line — were few in number. Faced with a choice between economic rights and political rights, a majority of citizens opted for economic rights. Victims of past abuses can and should be entitled to restitution and compensation for past sufferings. However, compensation should not include granting social power — such as making them prosecutors and judges — as often happens during periods of revolutionary change. Despite notable exceptions, such as Mandela’s choice

of state-building over revenge in South Africa, Petrovec argues that experience in Eastern Europe shows a tendency for new elites to display hostility, aggression, and vengeance toward those who dare to openly disagree or those whom they treat as former opponents. He asserts, perhaps controversially, that victims of the former regime do not make the most suitable leaders, holders of public office, or creators of a new crime policy. Instead of correcting injustices of the past, their resentment proves to be too powerful and they only create new injustices. Largely for this reason, people in Slovenia and Poland have recently opted for moderate but sufficiently liberal leaders, despite their Communist backgrounds.

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— G.S.