

BCA Dispatch

"The issue is not issues; the issue is the system"
—Ronnie Dugger

Newsletter of the **September**
Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy 2008

Benjamin Franklin was shown the new American constitution, and he said, "I don't like it, but I will vote for it because we need something right now. But this constitution in time will fail, as all such efforts do. And it will fail because of the corruption of the people, in a general sense." ---Gore Vidal

CHAPTER NEWS

The next meeting of BCA/NorthBridge will be on **Wednesday, October 1st**, at 7pm at the **Alliance offices, 760 Main Street, Waltham MA**. It's on the #70 bus line from Central Square, Cambridge, just behind the fieldstone church. Big parking lot. As usual, we will deal with our active and potential projects. For agenda and project info, call Barbara Clancy at 781-894-1179.

Joanna Herlihy with Cynthia Ritsher, Barbara Clancy, and Dave Lewit has just finished editing (Continued on Page 8>>)

Descent from Israelites a Zionist Myth 70AD Jews Left Palestine to Convert Others

by *Schlomo Sand, Le Monde Diplomatique, Feb 2008*

An Israeli historian suggests the diaspora was the consequence, not of the expulsion of the Hebrews from Palestine, but of going out to proselytize across north Africa, southern Europe and the Middle East.

EVERY ISRAELI "KNOWS" that he or she is the direct and exclusive descendant of a Jewish people which has existed since it received the Torah (1) in Sinai. According to this myth, the Jews escaped from Egypt and settled in the Promised Land, where they built the glorious kingdom of David and Solomon, which subsequently split into the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. They experienced two exiles: after the destruction of the first temple in the 6th century BC, and of the second temple, in 70 AD.

Two thousand years of wandering brought the Jews to Yemen, Morocco, Spain, Germany, Poland and deep into Russia. But, the story goes, they always managed to preserve blood links between their scattered communities. Their uniqueness was never compromised.

At the end of the 19th century conditions began to favor their return to their ancient homeland. If it had not been for the Nazi genocide, millions of Jews would have fulfilled the dream of 20 centuries and repopulated Eretz Israel, the biblical land of Israel. Palestine, a virgin land which had been waiting for its original inhabitants to return and awaken it. It belonged to the Jews, rather than to an Arab minority that had no history and had arrived there by chance. The wars in which the wandering people reconquered their land were just; the violent opposition of the local population was criminal.

This interpretation of Jewish history was developed as talented, imaginative historians built on surviving fragments of Jewish and Christian religious memory to construct a continuous genealogy for the Jewish people. Juda- (Continued on Page 6 >>)



"So Sambo beat the bitch!"

This is how Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin loudly described Barack Obama's win over Hillary Clinton to political colleagues in a restaurant a few days after Obama locked up the Democratic Party presidential nomination.

—Part-aboriginal waiter Lucille
[surname withheld—not for nothing was Palin's school nickname Sarah "Barracuda"].

"Responsibility"? Think Again.

Mayor Palin Let Houses Burn To the Ground

by *Pete Hauschka, open letter to friends, 1 Sept 2008*

"I guess a small-town mayor is sort of like a 'community organizer,' except that you have actual responsibilities."

—Sarah Palin, accepting VP nomination at Republican National Convention

THIS PICK FLOORED ME. Sarah Palin is a nice person. I've met her, I've even talked to her for a few minutes at a principals' conference a couple of years ago. She has lots going for her superficially. She speaks from the heart, like a spitfire mother; she can even be sort of funny sometimes. She is quite beautiful; athletic, and has that radiant glow of someone who actually spends time doing things outside. Unlike many politicians, she has lived a "real life" and done things that few living and working in DC could ever do...like dipnettin' fish, shootin' stuff and eating it out on the tundra, and havin' five kids.

Personally, I'd never vote for her. She has an extremely simple view of the world. I don't even think she has ever been abroad. As governor she has repeatedly shown us that she is unable to grasp the demands of leadership. She is very prone to cronyism of the worst kind. Every cabinet level political appointment she has made she has over-riden suggestions of our state advisory boards, and instead promoted those who had granted her direct political favors. (Continued on next page >>)

Not that other politicians don't do this, they do, but most of them are able to balance their appointments to ensure that at least a few people with real skill and experience are running big state agencies.

She also has been unable to pay attention to her Alaskan constituency. Personally, I've written several of our previous gov's and been asked to comment publicly on education policy. All the previous gov's have always acknowledged that contribution, criticism or comment; sometimes by direct reply, or at least by that of a staff member. Palin's office has been a zone of silence. Not I, nor one person I know commenting has ever gotten any sort of reply. Her claim of running an open or transparent government is totally false; the public simply has no role in her administration.

Her previous claim to fame was being mayor of Wasilla, a growing town about 40 minutes from Anchorage of about 15,000* people. Wasilla is a hellhole, even by Alaskan standards, where there are plenty of hellhole towns and villages. Wasilla is an ugly place that shows a complete absence of planning, design, or sense of public vision. Gov't agencies and services are completely overrun in this town; things are so bad that they can't even track their population or build schools in the right place, because most parts of the town don't require building permits, so the only clue about where people are settling are utility receipts. Imagine trying to be an emergency responder in this kind of place: *Houses don't just catch on fire in Wasilla, they burn to the ground, because by the time the fire department has figured out which road to take (no signs) or whose house it is (no directory), the place is done for**.* Palin was mayor of this town for at least 2 terms before being elected gov. a year and a half ago.

Her moral sense is simplistic and not inclusive. She is the sort of person who is used to using their "faith" to divide and isolate minority groups of human beings instead of uniting them. To her credit as Gov. she has kept out of this arena pretty well, but when in comfortable company (i.e the Matanuska Valley Republican Women's Club), she lets her moral cat out of the bag...

* Published figures put the town's population at 5 to 8 thousand.
** Italics ours. —Ed.

Pete Hauschka is principal of a small K-12 school in rural Alaska.

Ed. Note: *To put a woman in the White House—should she and McCain manage to steal the election—was a huge surprise for Republicans. To her credit, Gov. Sarah Palin's mouth is so big that commentators skipped cleavage, coiffure, and wardrobe to focus on political aspects of her person.*

It is a sad commentary on the people, the media, or the Constitution's very structure that we can't think of any way to get change other than to change White House personnel. No doubt, who is IN makes a big difference, but in each election cycle we have to go through this angst all over again. We might do better to think not of who has her hands on the levers of power, but of the levers themselves, and the cables that connect to the various institutions that are moved or jerked around by those cables—the federal courts, the lawyers of the Justice Department, the military councils, the special committees of Congress, the Federal Reserve, the ambassadors and their staffs, the Homeland Security with local police, NLRB, FCC, SEC, and so on.

What if the vice president were independently elected instead of being named by the presidential nominee? What if constitutional amending were made quicker and simpler? What if the senate were eliminated? What if the executive branch were organized more like a co-op than a corporation? What if....?... ■

Gallup Poll Not Neutral

PreElection Releases Timed to Favor McCain

by Dick Diver, DailyKos.com, 15 September 2008

THE GALLUP DAILY PRESIDENTIAL TRACKING POLL, which many of us follow more closely than we should, reports results based on a survey of registered voters. At some point in the future, Gallup is going to switch to "likely-voters" for the tracking poll, but we don't know exactly when.*

Just as Nate predicted over at 538, the Gallup tracking poll showed a stable, close race leading up to the conventions, then a bounce for Obama, and then a bounce for McCain that seems to be subsiding, though less quickly than Obama's. The longer-lasting effect of McCain's bounce is probably the result of his VP selection (and convention) stepping on Obama's, rather than any lasting shift in the race (despite what the pundits have rushed to conclude).

But I want to focus on the poll Gallup released last Monday, Sept. 8th, through *USA Today*, that used a sudden, unexplained, temporary shift to the likely-voter model and caused a huge splash in the media.

That poll, taken in the three days immediately following the Republican National Convention, showed by far the largest national lead McCain has ever had in any poll (54-44 among likely-voters), and generated a tremendous amount of attention. It helped drive the buzz for all of last week—that McCain got a huge bounce from his convention, that Palin was a game-changer, that Obama was in big trouble, etc.

Notice that Gallup never released a likely-voter poll over the three days immediately following the Democratic convention—nor did it release any polls through *USA Today* during Obama's bounce. Putting it in *USA Today* guarantees far greater attention than the tracking poll alone gets.

This was a deliberate choice by Gallup and *USA Today*—to release a poll that would maximize the impression of McCain's bounce and help shape the campaign narrative in McCain-Palin's favor.

On Friday, Gallup published this report discussing the differences between registered and likely-voters. Perhaps unintentionally, Frank Newport, the head of Gallup, made a huge admission that bears directly on the September 8th likely-voter poll.

Second, we are at this point reporting likely-voter estimates on only an occasional basis. We feel that the trends among registered voters give us the best way to track election preferences in our daily poll, in part because many voters are not yet in a position to accurately estimate their chances of voting on Election Day. But from time to time, we do estimate (and report) likely-voter results to give us a feel for the potential difference turnout could make in November. So far this summer, there have been occasions when—as was the case this past weekend after the GOP convention—likely-voters were decidedly more Republican. But there have also been occasions when there was little difference between the vote patterns of likely-voters and those of registered voters.

In other words, Gallup is admitting the following: At the time it released the September 8th poll (showing McCain up by 10), it believed institutionally that likely-voter results were less accurate than registered voter results.

Likely-voter results have only occasionally diverged from the registered voter results.

Despite these facts, Gallup deliberately chose to release, to

the widest fanfare possible, a poll using an admittedly less accurate method (the likely-voter method) at the time of McCain's maximum convention bounce, knowing that it would show a large divergence (+10 for McCain vs. only +4 with registered voters) based on the likely-voter method, even though such a divergence is not often present.

In short, they combined all possible factors in McCain's favor to make his lead seem as big as possible—and the media went wild with it.

This is why DailyKos's tracking poll is such an important service to the country, and indeed to the world. Markos cannot be thanked enough for giving the world its one true "people's poll." It is the people's poll not because it favors Democrats—it doesn't. It is the people's poll because it is transparent. It releases the internals every day. Instead of just setting forth party ID "targets," as Rasmussen does, the DailyKos poll simply tells the reader for each sample, exactly what proportion of Ds, Rs, and Is, were polled. And unlike Gallup, it doesn't switch from registered to likely-voter models at opportune times to get attention and reshape the race.

Gallup wants attention and it wants to influence the election. We need to take back our process, and DailyKos is helping with its honest, open tracking poll.

** Ed. Note— "Likely-voter" is a subjective term which can be objectified in different ways. Questions can be asked of the registered voter which may, or may not, accurately predict whether (s)he will turn out to vote and actually cast a ballot. Some pollsters use such questions to weight candidate preferences of respondents, some simply exclude from their samples those who don't make a certain cutoff (calling them "unlikely"), and some may switch criteria days or weeks before the election—falsely suggesting surges or flagging for a given candidate.*

High percentages of Black and Hispanic voters consistently vote Democratic. If registered Black or Hispanic voters had worse records than Whites for actually showing up at the polls, they may be dropped from the sample even though in THIS election they have stronger reasons to show up, thus falsely giving the edge to the Republican candidate in the pre-election "horse-race"—discouraging mildly pro-Obama voters from turning out.

Thanks to Sally Castleman for forwarding this article.

Labor Day Nostalgia

Workers Must Unite with Communities

by Bill Fletcher Jr., BlackCommentator.com, 4 Sept 2008

ORGANIZED LABOR HAS VANISHED, as if it were part of the story line of a science fiction novel. Labor Day 2008 came and went and...nothing. I searched through the newspaper...nothing. I looked at the TV schedule...nothing. It was as if there is not and never was anything called organized labor.

You may be saying that I am exaggerating this problem. After all, we just completed the Democratic Party Convention; we are beginning the Republican Party Convention; and Hurricane Gustav is terrorizing the Gulf Coast, therefore, there is too much other news. Yet, while all of that is true, topical stories are developed way in advance. TV stations identify, with plenty of time to spare, which documentaries they will show, as well as interviews they will hold.

On one level none of this should be surprising. The percentage of workers represented by labor unions has been on the decline since 1955 (35%) down to approximately 12% today. Unions have been on the defensive with employers actively undermining the right of workers to join or form unions, as well as blocking virtually every effort on their part to raise the living standards of their members. Successive U.S. presidential administrations have been actively hostile towards labor unions and the rights of workers to join them. Quite ironically, today's right-wing Republicans insist that workers MUST choose the union to represent them by secret ballot without mentioning that free choice does not exist when employers are permitted to intimidate workers before they cast their votes.

It would be easy to stop this commentary here and shake our heads at the anti-worker animus on the part of employers and governmental authorities. The problem is that unions themselves allowed this situation to worsen without sending out a battle cry and retooling themselves to face mighty corporate opponents. For too long, the leadership of organized labor believed in the pendulum theory, i.e., that things were rough, but that the pendulum would ultimately swing in the other direction and that success would soon be here. The problem is that the pendulum seems to have gotten stuck.

While organized labor needs to do a hell of a lot more organizing, events since the 2005 split of the AFL-CIO (the largest labor federation in the USA) have demonstrated that fancy rhetoric and intense organizing are not enough. The vision of labor unionism itself must shift in a way that convinces working class people that it is a cause with which to unite, irrespective of whether one happens to currently be in a union or not. Secret deals with employers in order to secure bargaining rights; the suppression of dissent [within unions] in the name of 'unity'; fostering illusions that corporate America can be appealed to in order to realize the value of labor unions as partners in the future economic growth of the USA, are all recipes for ultimate disillusionment, disorganization and despair.

Labor Day 2008, and this entire period up through the November 2008 national elections, should actually be a period for labor union activists to do some reflecting. This may sound odd since we need to be out there in the trenches pushing for pro-worker candidates, but I would say that humans can usually do more than one thing at a time. Union activists and their supporters need to be thinking through what steps unions can take to embrace our allies in other social movements and chart a course that represents a partnership. No, not a partnership with corporate America that is interested in suppressing the rights of workers and their living standards—rather, a partnership with other progressive movements that are interested in significant change in the USA.

During the course of several visits to South Africa I was struck by how different the union movement was there compared with the one we have in the USA. In addition to its leaders being fairly young (tending to be in their late 20s through early 40s) the movement is very dynamic. Part of being dynamic was/is grounded in a vision that the union movement is about changing society, or at least being part of a larger group that is actively changing society to the benefit of working class people. Rather than sitting on the side lines, or even lobbying and handing out financial contributions, the union movement in South Africa has focused on both the needs of its members as well as the steps that need to be taken to represent the interests of workers more generally in structurally changing the country.

It seems to me that this is what Labor Day should be about.

A former union organizer, educator, and leader of the Black Radical Congress, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is executive editor of *BlackCommentator.com* and co-author of *Solidarity Divided: the Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice* (2008).

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Unions Out of the Rut, Into the World

BEFORE WE PICK A SPOT to spark a 19th Century or South African sense of union social activism, let's consider the bigger picture. Workers today are, by and large, not full-time employees of medium-sized, local businesses. If they are not public employees, clusters—apt for organizing—are working for giant corporations or their subsidiaries or suppliers whose management is distant both geographically and in organizational terms. And rather than permanent employees, they may be “contractors” or “associates” with truncated legal rights and little or no power based on seniority. To keep it that way, union-busting has become a consultative fine art.

Corporations have elaborated rule-systems, presented in a psychologically savvy way, giving supervisors little discretion. Workers are subjected to participatory attitude training—stressing individual compliance and manipulative acting toward others—rather than the autonomous group decision-making (quality circles) so popular in the 1960s when Japanese industry was ascendent (even though the Japanese imported this personnel innovation from American consultants).

All up and down the lines of authority, organizational behavior is fear-based rather than inventive and experimental. In IBM, for example, technical workers and managers are organized into teams across “profit centers” which must show quick bottom-line results or everybody will be reassigned or someone will be fired. For corporate top management the spur is not creative competition so much as industry monopoly and government favoritism. Altogether, corporate values are engendered in workers not unlike Chinese Communist brainwashing.

Thus, union organizing becomes an uphill battle with unceptive, insecure workers who tentatively accept corporate propaganda and training. Half the challenge, then, is involving workers in the truth—interactively in groups, the whole big-picture truth as well as how it applies in their local situation. Bottom-up videos need to be made of this in practice, and DVDs widely distributed.

The other half of the challenge is making resistance and alternative action viable, overcoming fear of being dumped and jobless. Some workers do this on their own by leaving the giant corporation and starting or joining a startup company. But of course this takes money. Could unions band together to form a development bank for their own cooperative companies? They might just get funding from communities, or on the internet. Or they might beef-up strike funds and go beyond mere resistance by funneling national funds into one or more experimental local coops, possibly with facilities abandoned by corporations which have moved on. Dreaming? Yes, but why not send a crew to the Northeast Central Italy industrial area or to Brazil or Argentina to film a vibrant alternative? Or can American/Canadian or other examples be found, and a Truth War begun?

These preparations may be right but circumstances wrong for success. As Naomi Klein points out in *Shock Doctrine*, the moment to seize is during upset of the regular system. After decades of union decline, the corporate system which ascended in the mid 1970s appears to be defeating itself. Energy prices are soaring to the sole benefit of shareholders while the dollar

declines in value abroad, the war and the empire have been exposed as frauds while contractors scramble for spoils, corporate depredation of the environment is visibly endangering our river valleys, coastal cities, and our adorable polar bears, and the World Trade Organization crumbles as China, India, South America, and Russia ascend and various regions rebel. Pro-corporate pundits and political parties are more desperate and suffering attrition, internet users are more numerous and becoming defiant, and crucially—moral leadership is up for grabs.

Our November election may end the Reagan Epoch directly by an Obama win, or if stolen yet again will probably generate serious law suits and widespread social disorder, exacerbated by federal crackdowns, but with increasing noncompliance of local authorities. In that event, calls for order may be filled in part by union organizing if organizers collaborate with civic groups, and union leaders may accede to public office.

If a Sarah Palin can jump into the driver's seat of the Western World, then anybody—any populist candidate or wave of candidates—can win and can wrestle down her crazy empire. Because resistance will be strong mainly in the Northeast, West, and North Central, people in those communities will start to deliberate local and regional new constitutions—leaping over the federal/corporate governmental system which has patently failed us. Conversion of military industry will at long last be the focus for recovery of both unionism and democracy. ■

Betrayal of Participatory Budgeting Brazil Mayor Undermines Econ Democracy

by Sergio Baierle, *Governance Link*, July 2008

FROM THE FIRST DAY IN POWER, the Porto Alegre Mayor's Office has tried to blame everything that has gone wrong in the city on the former (Workers Party) administration. If anyone tries to point out a problem the Mayor's Office comes up with the same old excuses: “The former administration were the ones who did it”; or “it all boils down to a mere ideological dispute”. If there is, for example, some dispute involving the election for Participatory Budget (PB) council members in some neighborhood, the city government puts the blame on “external forces” trying to spread discord among community members and “destroy PB”.

Really, the only force currently operating in some communities is the so-called “governance team”—a group of government agents, partly made up by former council members—who currently hold positions in the government or in outsourced service-providing companies that seek to work out “partnerships” with specific community leaders. They aim to gain support for the government by providing small services or some sort of contract with the government. All this is achieved without the PB's regional forums' or managing councils' approval. When society, as represented in participatory actions, does not please the government, it simply seeks to create other “participatory spaces” for the part of “society” that pleases it. That is how the old tries to gain the upper hand on the new: by corrupting it.

“PB is still alive!”, the government repeatedly and publicly claims, as if it is trying to convince itself. There are doubts about the validity of its statement, the most serious of which have been pointed out by participatory budgeting council members themselves. How can one defend the idea that PB still exists, they say, if (1) The decisions made by people do not translate into more resources being allocated in the Investment Plan?; (2)

The neighborhoods that haven't prioritized certain themes receive more of those resources than those that prioritize them?; and (3) When it comes to implementation, the city government cherry-picks initiatives that suit its needs without paying any attention to the priority scales that are voted on in each neighborhood and without setting up collective management teams to preside over the public works?

It is at this point that the good Samaritans appear, whether naively or not, to say that yes, they were consulted in a meeting. They only forget to mention it wasn't a PB meeting, but a Municipal Governance Department one, for which there was no established agenda, minutes or venue. Invariably, such meetings can only be attended by those invited.

Strangely enough, the Governance Department operates in a sort of institutional limbo. It is the government who decide as they please whether some issue falls within the scope of Governance. There really is an external force in operation in the communities: the well-known cronyism trying to neutralize Participatory Budgeting as a possible means for popular power and self-determination. Mr. Mayor has recently affirmed that his administration has maintained the former government's average investment level. Once more, the past haunts the administration. The argument is not only fallacious, but badly put. It is certainly true that the former administration (2002/2004) did not fare well in terms of PB (investments dropped to 7 per cent of the budget and execution of planned works stagnated at 70 per cent). But what can be said of the execution level of the last three annual investment plans at 33 per cent? What about the 2008 Investment Plan that allocates a mere one per cent of the budget to PB, which amounts to less than one-tenth of the investments proposed by the Annual Budget Law?

At every PB assembly meeting we witness a new dance of numbers. Unlike last year, when the government's promises were so consistent that they could have been taped and played at each assembly meeting, this year the Mayor seemed to doubt his own figures. On some occasions, it was said that there were 575 works and services planned. On other occasions the figure jumped 957, just to drop to 907 sometime later. The same applies to infrastructure works and services executed by the current administration. The cabalistic number 611 was repeatedly mentioned but sometimes it referred to both public works and services and at other times to only works. At one occasion, it was said that more than half the figures involved works and services carried out by the former administration—a persistent ominous ghost. On another occasion, it was declared that the total amount of resources allocated to finishing projects initiated during the previous administration amounted to 80 per cent.

It would be a easy for the government to publish a calculation which the average second-grader could understand. They could publish a list of the 611 infrastructure works and services and identify the region or the theme they belong to, as well as the stage in the Investment Plan where they originally appeared. Why don't they publish it? What are they afraid of? If they did so, it would be possible to know how much unfinished work was left by the previous administration and what is being completed by the current one. That would constitute a republican and dignified attitude. Maybe the residents of poor neighborhoods would discover the greatest irony in the history of participatory budgeting: that the neighborhoods that received the biggest volume of resources may have been those who never or hardly ever participated in PB like Floresta, Higienópolis, Moinhos de Vento, Auxiliadora, Mont Serrat, Bela Vista, and Três Figueiras.

Let's do a mathematical exercise by using the figures pro-

duced by the government itself. On December 31st 2004 there were 966 planned infrastructure works and services that had either started and not been completed or were still on the drawing board (info collected by CIDADE). It is easy to go about the rest of the calculation. All that is needed is to add the official figure relating to new demands included in the 2005-2008 period ($302 + 214 + 219 + 185 = 920$) and deduct what was executed in terms of these Investment Plans ($115 + 105 + 21 + 0 = 241$). If the current administration insists that it accomplished 611, but we know that 241 of those relate to the 2005-2008 Plans (at least that is what can be found on the internet site), there would remain, hypothetically, 370 infrastructure works and services to be deducted from the previous liability ($611 \text{ minus } 241$). That is true if we take it for granted that those works and services were really accomplished, for such a list has never been shown to the public. It is only in the 2006 Investment Plan that 66 works and services that were part of Investment Plans prior to 2005 were included to be executed by the current administration, of which only 21 were effectively performed. Thus, we have a total of 262 demands that were effectively met by the current Administration as of March 2008. The government has also said that 190 infrastructure works and services will be finished in 2008 based on another non-existent list. We tried to check this figure on their web site, but that proved to be impossible.

On the Mayor's Offices' web site, work that has been officially approved and given a protocol number is labeled as "in process". If we take into account the amount of demands carried out in the last three Investment Plans, which reached an average 33 per cent, according to information given by the Town Hall itself, we could estimate there are still over 63 infrastructure works and services to be carried out by the end of 2008. In other words, the amount of infrastructure works and services that are running behind schedule will have increased by the end of the Mayor's term. In the figures provided by the government's PR staff, even the addition calculation is incorrect. In an accurate calculation based on official PB monitoring reports of infrastructure works and services available on the City Hall's website, the amount of outstanding demands by the end of 2008 may reach 1561 (a 62 percent rise in relation to the end of 2004), without considering 63 works and services that might be finished and 190 that the government claims are underway. Of course, all these constantly changing figures would not be necessary if Participatory Budgeting data were really transparent.

Yes, PB is really alive but as a parody, for it is constantly haunted by the past and manipulated by the current administration in a mix of philanthropic glamour and cold political calculation.

Sergio Baierte is the Director of CIDADE Porto Alegre.

ANOTHER SOUTH AMERICAN CHALLENGE

Bolivian Elites Rebel

17 SEPT.—THE PETROCARBON LORDS AND VASSALS of gas-rich eastern Bolivia are very upset about democracy. The popularly elected and popularly reconfirmed President Evo Morales—an indigenous person of all things!—has been fostering a new constitution which would distribute the country's natural wealth to all, not just to the beneficiaries of the Spanish Conquest. The lords, probably with US Gov support, have been fostering riots and mayhem to achieve autonomy or a coup d'etat. This has alarmed all South American leaders including anti-terrorist President Uribe of Colombia. For two days now they—leaders of UNASUR—have been meeting in Chile to support President Morales and find a solution... Stay tuned! ■

ism's abundant historiography encompasses many different approaches.

But none have ever questioned the basic concepts developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Discoveries that might threaten this picture of a linear past were marginalised. The national imperative rejected any contradiction of or deviation from the dominant story. University departments exclusively devoted to "the history of the Jewish people", as distinct from those teaching what is known in Israel as general history, made a significant contribution to this selective vision. The debate on what constitutes Jewishness has obvious legal implications, but historians ignored it: as far as they are concerned, any descendant of the people forced into exile 2,000 years ago is a Jew.

Nor did these official investigators of the past join the controversy provoked by the "new historians" from the late 1980s. Most of the limited number of participants in this public debate were from other disciplines or non-academic circles: sociologists, orientalist, linguists, geographers, political scientists, literary academics and archaeologists developed new perspectives on the Jewish and Zionist past. Departments of Jewish history remained defensive and conservative, basing themselves on received ideas. While there have been few significant developments in national history over the past 60 years (a situation unlikely to change in the short term), the facts that have emerged face any honest historian with fundamental questions.

Founding myths shaken

Is the Bible a historical text? Writing during the early half of the 19th century, the first modern Jewish historians, such as Isaak Markus Jost (1793-1860) and Leopold Zunz (1794-1886), did not think so. They regarded the Old Testament as a theological work reflecting the beliefs of Jewish religious communities after the destruction of the first temple. It was not until the second half of the century that Heinrich Graetz (1817-91) and others developed a "national" vision of the Bible and transformed Abraham's journey to Canaan, the flight from Egypt and the united kingdom of David and Solomon into an authentic national past. By constant repetition, Zionist historians have subsequently turned these Biblical "truths" into the basis of national education. But during the 1980s an earthquake shook these founding myths. The discoveries made by the "new archaeology" discredited a great exodus in the 13th century BC. Moses could not have led the Hebrews out of Egypt into the Promised Land, for the good reason that the latter was Egyptian territory at the time. And there is no trace of either a slave revolt against the pharaonic empire or of a sudden conquest of Canaan by outsiders.

Nor is there any trace or memory of the magnificent kingdom of David and Solomon. Recent discoveries point to the existence, at the time, of two small kingdoms: Israel, the more powerful, and Judah, the future Judea. The general population of Judah did not go into 6th century BC exile: only its political and intellectual elite were forced to settle in Babylon. This decisive encounter with Persian religion gave birth to Jewish monotheism.

Then there is the question of the exile of 70 AD. There has been no real research into this turning point in Jewish history, the cause of the diaspora. And for a simple reason: the Romans never exiled any nation from anywhere on the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean. Apart from enslaved prisoners, the population of Judea continued to live on their lands, even after the destruction of the second temple. Some converted to Christianity in the 4th century, while the majority embraced Islam during the 7th century Arab conquest.

Most Zionist thinkers were aware of this: Yitzhak Ben Zvi, later president of Israel, and David Ben Gurion, its first prime minister, accepted it as late as 1929, the year of the great Palestinian revolt. Both stated on several occasions that the peasants of Palestine were the descendants of the inhabitants of ancient Judea (2).

Proselytising zeal

But if there was no exile after 70 AD, where did all the Jews who have populated the Mediterranean since antiquity come from? The smokescreen of national historiography hides an astonishing reality. From the Maccabean revolt of the mid-2nd century BC to the Bar Kokhba revolt of the 2nd century AD, Judaism was the most actively proselytizing religion. The Judeo-Hellenic



Hasmoneans forcibly converted the Idumeans of southern Judea and the Itureans of Galilee and incorporated them into the people of Israel. Judaism spread across the Middle East and around the Mediterranean. The 1st century AD saw the emergence in modern Kurdistan of the Jewish kingdom of Adiabene, just one of many that converted.

The writings of Flavius Josephus are not the only evidence of the proselytizing zeal of the Jews. Horace, Seneca, Juvenal and Tacitus were among the Roman writers who feared it. The Mishnah and the Talmud (3) authorised conversion, even if the wise men of the Talmudic tradition expressed reservations in the face of the mounting pressure from Christianity.

Although the early 4th century triumph of Christianity did not mark the end of Jewish expansion, it relegated Jewish proselytism to the margins of the Christian cultural world. During the 5th century, in modern Yemen, a vigorous Jewish kingdom emerged in Himyar, whose descendants preserved their faith through the Islamic conquest and down to the present day. Arab chronicles tell of the existence, during the 7th century, of Judaized Berber tribes; and at the end of the century the legendary Jewish queen Dihya contested the Arab advance into northwest Africa. Jewish Berbers participated in the conquest of the Iberian peninsula and helped establish the unique symbiosis between Jews and Muslims that characterized Hispano-Arabic culture.

The most significant mass conversion occurred in the 8th century, in the massive Khazar kingdom between the Black and Caspian seas. The expansion of Judaism from the Caucasus into modern Ukraine created a multiplicity of communities, many of which retreated from the 13th century Mongol invasions into eastern Europe. There, with Jews from the Slavic lands to the south and from what is now modern Germany, they formed the basis of Yiddish culture (4).

Prism of Zionism

Until about 1960 the complex origins of the Jewish people were more or less reluctantly acknowledged by Zionist historiography. But thereafter they were marginalized and finally erased from Israeli public memory. The Israeli forces who seized Jerusalem in 1967 believed themselves to be the direct descendants of the mythic kingdom of David rather than—God forbid—of Berber warriors or Khazar horsemen. The Jews claimed to constitute a specific ethnic group that had returned to Jerusalem, its capital, from 2,000 years of exile and wandering. This monolithic, linear edifice is supposed to be supported by biology as well as

history. Since the 1970s supposedly scientific research, carried out in Israel, has desperately striven to demonstrate that Jews throughout the world are closely genetically related.

Research into the origins of populations now constitutes a legitimate and popular field in molecular biology and the male Y chromosome has been accorded honored status in the frenzied search for the unique origin of the "chosen people". The problem is that this historical fantasy has come to underpin the politics of identity of the state of Israel. By validating an essentialist, ethnocentric definition of Judaism it encourages a segregation that separates Jews from non-Jews—whether Arabs, Russian immigrants or foreign workers.

Sixty years after its foundation, Israel refuses to accept that it should exist for the sake of its citizens. For almost a quarter of the population, who are not regarded as Jews, this is not their state legally. At the same time, Israel presents itself as the homeland of Jews throughout the world, even if these are no longer persecuted refugees, but the full and equal citizens of other countries.

A global ethnocracy invokes the myth of the eternal nation, reconstituted on the land of its ancestors, to justify internal discrimination against its own citizens. It will remain difficult to imagine a new Jewish history while the prism of Zionism continues to fragment everything into an ethnocentric spectrum. But Jews worldwide have always tended to form religious communities, usually by conversion; they cannot be said to share an ethnicity derived from a unique origin and displaced over 20 centuries of wandering.

The development of historiography and the evolution of modernity were consequences of the invention of the nation state, which preoccupied millions during the 19th and 20th centuries. The new millennium has seen these dreams begin to shatter. And more and more academics are analyzing, dissecting and deconstructing the great national stories, especially the myths of common origin so dear to chroniclers of the past. <<

NOTES

(1) The Torah, from the Hebrew root yara (to teach) is the founding text of Judaism. It consists of the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

(2) See David Ben Gurion and Yitzhak Ben Zvi, *Eretz Israel in the past and present, 1918* (in Yiddish), and *Jerusalem, 1980* (in Hebrew); Yitzhak Ben Zvi, *Our population in the country*, Executive Committee of the Union for Youth and the Jewish National Fund, Warsaw, 1929 (in Hebrew).

(3) The Mishnah, regarded as the first work of rabbinic literature, was drawn up around 200 AD. The Talmud is a synthesis of rabbinic discussions on the law, customs and history of the Jews. The Palestinian Talmud was written between the 3rd and 5th centuries; the Babylonian Talmud was compiled at the end of the 5th century.

(4) Yiddish, spoken by the Jews of eastern Europe, was a Germano-Slavic language incorporating Hebrew words.

Shlomo Sand is professor of history at Tel Aviv university and the author of Comment le peuple juif fut inventé (Fayard, Paris, 2008). This article was translated by Donald Hounam. Thanks to Rev. Ignacio Castuera, for forwarding this article.

Ed. Note: *What are the dynamics of this crusading (or stelling) diaspora? We note that the theory of cognitive dissonance predicts and finds that millennial cults increase proselytizing activity after a disconfirmation of their expected millennium event (Festinger, Riecken & Schachter, When Prophecy Fails, 1956). In other words, as a response to disappointment, proselytizing can gather more true believers to bolster the faith, even though there may have been a "misreading" of the specifics. When the Romans destroyed the Jewish temple in 70 AD, the Jews thereabouts were probably very disappointed in the Lord Almighty,*

who was supposed to favor them. However, they allowed that God, as with Job, works in mysterious ways. So going out and getting more people into the fold of the faithful—or convincing one another that the effort is worth it—bolstered their faith.

Nature's Rights Constitutionally Set

AFTER GENERATIONS OF STRUGGLE, the chiefly indigenous people of Ecuador finally managed to elect a humane regime, creating a new constitution featuring the Rights of Nature. The draft, to be ratified by referendum, guarantees protection, restoration, and enjoyment of the entire ecosystem—with the precautionary principle and government incentives.

Protecting Democracy

How They Train Convention Security Guards

by Avi Steinberg, Salon.com, 6 Sept 2008 (excerpt)

GATHERED IN THE BASEMENT of an office building in a tough section of St. Paul, less than two weeks before the gavel drops downtown at the Republican National Convention, roughly 30 recruits hired by a private security company sit thru 12 hours of lectures. I am one of these officers-in-training.

The group is a mix of moonlighting prison guards and cops, infantrymen and Marines between tours of duty in Iraq, immigrants, assorted freelance goons and young career seekers. There is also a crisp-looking airman and an outspoken right-wing ideologue, who never fails to demonstrate his remarkable talent for transforming any conversation, even one about the weather, into a discussion about the Mossad.

The RNC, I am told, is a training ground for these recruits. Those who perform well during the grueling 12-hour shifts before, during and after the convention will be considered for permanent jobs at the security firm.

The instructor is Charles T. Thibodeau, or Chuck, a rotund and self-effacing 65-year-old security consultant bedecked in gold jewelry. Thibodeau leans back, cracks open a can of Rockstar Energy Drink and extols the virtues of non-heroism. He has taken painkillers all week to cope with a recent operation to remove varicose veins and is in something of a confessional mood—having been raised by a town drunk (one of his confessions) he isn't much of a romantic to begin with.

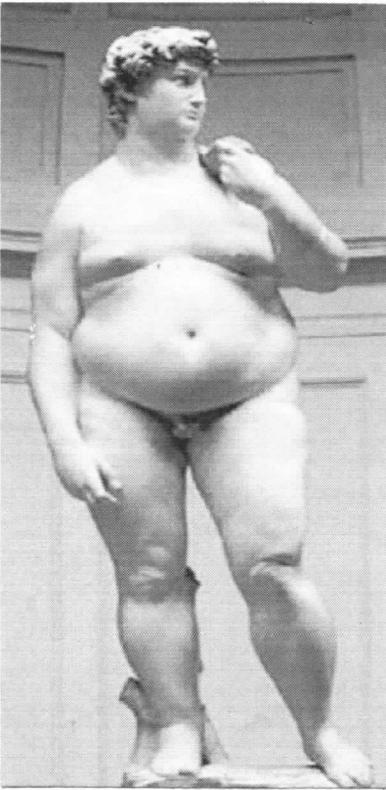
"I'll be the first to admit it," he says, crossing his arms. "I don't fight fair. I fight to win. If you got to take someone out—sorry, I mean, 'reposition them to the ground'—you go in with help. Under no circumstances do you go toe-to-toe. You gotta get some beefcake in there. I myself prefer to go in with four to five people. Last thing I want is a level playing field."

"What if you're alone and the guy is coming for you?" asks one of the recruits. Thibodeau doesn't miss a beat: "You run."

"I know what some of you tough guys are thinking," says Thibodeau, draining his Rockstar. "But trust me, unless you've got no escape route and are being seriously threatened, and can prove that in court by crying on the stand, you had better retreat. You either run or you cry. Your choice."

A recruit sitting in the back of the room begins to fidget and sink into his chair. He wears a T-shirt in the ubiquitous purple and yellow of Minnesota Vikings football. The shirt reads "What Would Leif Erikson Do?" Soon enough the recruit answers his own question: Leif Erikson, it turns out, would stand up, wipe his hands on his jeans, mutter "Fuck this" under his breath, slip out the back, and not return... ■

AMERICA'S REVENGE, or is it EUROPE'S?



After a two-year visit to the United States, Michelangelo's *David* is returning to Italy.

—courtesy Raj Patel, manager of the blog stuffedandstarved.org

CHAPTER NEWS (Continued from Page 1)

into 5 29-minute highlight DVDs of the 2005 Roundtable conference in Burlington VT on participatory budgeting and governance as part of our series "Popular Governance in New England", and separate presentations with discussion on the Burlington system (**Michael Monte** et al.), town meeting in Concord MA (**Ned Perry**), Boston neighborhood prioritizing conferences (**Chuck Turner**), and the Brattleboro MA civic network (**Larry Bloch**). The seminal system of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, is discussed in the Overview (**Dave Lewit**), as well as Derry NH (**Bill McCann**) and others' experiences (**Jason Pramas**, **Peter Clavelle**) including snips of the above... These DVDs will soon be available for posting on web sites and broadcast on community cable TV, as well as for local showings with discussion, and for home and organizational use. Call Joanna at 617-864-0506... After national elections Dave is planning to start organizing Roundtable III: "Locally-Based Regional Economy". Call him at 617-266-8687 to team up.

During the next few weeks NE state **citizen trade commissions** will meet for hearings (NH and ME, see *Action Alerts* >>), and a members' interstate roundtable which Dave Lewit will attend as an observer on 19 September. Barbara Clancy noted that "the Maine board grew out of a state-level bill authorizing a study of NAFTA's impact on Maine's economy. Passage relied on a lot of outreach and education, and a *big coalition* of groups. They had supporters mail *postcards to legislators*, and they got *names on petitions*. The biggest issue for the legislature was NAFTA chapter 11 [companies allowed to sue local and state governments represented by US trade lawyers] and the problem of preserving state sovereignty."

Meanwhile, with regard to our **Democracy Protection** project, Dave was told by Boston Police Commissioner **Davis's** administrative assistant that he could file a Freedom of Information Act

request (!) to see how the police would respond to any request by Homeland Security, and could contact Boston's Homeland Security agent at City Hall—in other words, police policy is not transparent... Conversations with **Neil Berman** of National Lawyers Guild and **Nancy Murray** of ACLU of Mass bore bitter fruit—they felt that no local officials are ready to disclose their civic support tactics until a crisis descends. What's your take?

ACTION ALERTS

Watch NYU professor **Mark Crispin Miller** anytime on www.NewEnglandAlliance.org (click above NE Flag, on Democracy Protection). Two short videos, 15 min total. "**Endgame**": How you can expect another stolen election this November, and how we might be subjected to martial law. Some suggestions about dealing with these.

Thu. 25 Sept. 6pm, Berlin NH. Public Hearing: "**Impact of International Trade Agreements on New Hampshire**". Your testimony is welcome. Everyone is invited to attend. Sponsor: NH Citizens Trade Policy Commission. Location: White Mts Community College, 2020 Riverside Drive (north part of Berlin on Rte 16, 4 hrs north of Boston via I-93.) Contact Arnie Alpert, American Friends Service Committee, (603) 224-2407, aalpert@afsc.org or Jaime Contois, Working Families Win, (603) 504-2906, Jaime@wfwins.org.

Sat. 27 Sept. 10am-3pm. Boston. "**Women's Peace Tables**": Strategize together to prevent wars, protect human rights. Follows up Beijing World Conference on Women with many sessions like this across the US, sponsored by WILPF. Please register by 20 Sept: Libby, EBG17e@msn.com, 617-969-6384. Brochures to distribute: elisabeth_leonard@verizon.net. Sprout Hall, Cathedral Church of St. Paul, 138 Tremont St (opp. Park St T), side entrance. Free; continental breakfast, bring your own lunch.

Thu. 9 Oct. 6-9pm. Bangor ME. Public Testimony: **Impact of Trade Agreements like NAFTA, CAFTA, and WTO on Maine.** Sponsor: Citizen Trade Policy Commission of the Maine Legislature. At Husson University. Info: (207) 777-6387 info@pica.ws

JOIN THE BCA

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN BOSTON TO LOVE BCA
Please help us as we fight to make a better future for ourselves and our children — Join the Boston/Cambridge Alliance for Democracy. (Cut out or copy this form and send it to Dave Lewit, 271 Dartmouth St. #2h, Boston, MA 02116.)

BOSTON-CAMBRIDGE ALLIANCE for DEMOCRACY PLEDGE
___ \$33/Year - "Count me in!"
___ \$66/Year - "Contributor" (We need to average this amount.)
___ \$111/Year - "Sustainer" (Helping us thrive.)
___ \$222/Year - "Community Steward"
___ \$500/Year - "Realize the vision"
___ What's fair for YOU? _\$_

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Phone: Day _____ Night: _____
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COLOPHON

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