

URPE Newsletter

2006 URPE Summer Conference

Friday, Aug. 11—Monday, Aug. 14
Camp Deer Run, NY

Nationalism, Internationalism, and Nature

Plenaries:

Wars and Natural Resources

Katrina: Race and Class

Latin America: Breaking the Mold

New place! New date!

2006 Summer Conference will take place a week earlier than previous conferences and will take place at a new site, Camp Deer Run, near Pine Bush, New York.

This is going to be a “new and improved” URPE Summer Conference. We look forward in particular to seeing people who have been unable to attend in the past because of the early start to their academic year. And those people who have been deterred by the Spartan accommodations in drafty cabins will find the new camp a great improvement. See page 4 for a description of the new camp and its facilities, and check out the online pictures of the camp. As always, the URPE summer conference is kid-friendly, with free day

care available for those who pre-register. So put the dates in your calendar and look forward to a terrific conference.

In Memoriam: Harry Magdoff

URPE mourns the death of Harry Magdoff (1913 - 2006).

Harry Magdoff, co-editor of *Monthly Review* since 1969 and one of the world’s leading political economists, died on New Year’s Day, 2006 at his home in Vermont. He kept the journal to the socialist principles and theoretical and pedagogical standards of its late founders, Paul M. Sweezy, who died in February 2004, and Leo Huberman (1903-1968).

Widely recognized for his economic analysis of imperialism, Magdoff is author of *The Age of Imperialism* (1969). This ground-breaking book provided a theoretical foundation for many people active in the anti-Vietnam war movement in the United States, and was subsequently translated into 15 languages. His later writings included *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present* (1977), and, co-authored with Paul Sweezy, *The Dynamics of U.S. Capitalism* (1970), *The End of Prosperity* (1977), *The Deepening Crisis of U.S. Capitalism* (1980), *Stagnation and the Financial Explosion* (1987), and *The Irreversible Crisis* (1988), all from Monthly Review Press. Six of his essays

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2005-2006 STEERING COMMITTEE**Elected members**

Cyrus Bina (04-07) Dept of Economics/Management, University of Minnesota-Morris, 600 East 4th Street, Morris, MN 56267; (320) 589-6193; <binac@mrs.umn.edu>

David Brennan (05-08) Franklin & Marshall College, P.O. Box 3003, Lancaster, PA 17604-3003; (717) 291-3936; <david.brennan@fandm.edu>

Al Campbell (03-06), 1645 Campus Center Dr. Rm. 308, Salt Lake City, UT 84112-9300; (801) 585-3521; <Al@economics.utah.edu>

Graham Cassano (04-07), Sociology Department, Southern Connecticut State University, 501 Crescent St., New Haven, CT 06515; (203) 407-8300; <Graham@xrgb.com>

Bilge Erten (05-08) Prince Hall, 286 Sunset Ave., UMass/Amherst, Amherst MA 01002; (413) 695-8830 <berten@econs.umass.edu>

Doug Koritz (04-07), Dept of Economics & Finance, Buffalo State College, 1300 Elmwood Ave, Buffalo, NY 14222; (716) 878-6640; <koritzdg@buffalostate.edu>

Laurie Nisonoff (03-06) Social Science, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA 01002; 413-559-5397 (o); <lnisonoff@hampshire.edu>

Patty Lee Parmalee (05-06) 211 W. 102 #5B, NYC, NY 10025; 212-663-2911; <publiccleaningpost@earthlink.net>

Paddy Quick (04-07), Economics Department, St. Francis College, 180 Remsen Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201; 631-286-5168 (h); <paddyquick@aol.com>

Alfredo Saad-Filho (04-06) Dept of Development Studies, SOAS, University of London, England; 44-20-7898-4504 <as59@soas.ac.uk>

Leanne Ussher (05-08) Economics Department, PH 300-0, Queens College, CUNY, 65-30 Kissena Blvd, Flushing NY 11375. <leanne.usscher@qc.cuny.edu>

Women's Caucus Representative

Jenny Brown (05-08) Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives, P.O. Box 2625, Gainesville, FL 32602; 352-378-5655; <jbrown72073@cs.com>

Ex-Officio**URPE National Office**

Germai Medhanie, URPE National Office, Gordon Hall, University of Massachusetts, 418 N. Pleasant Street, Amherst, MA 01002-1735. Tel. 413-577-0806. Fax 413-577-0261 E-mail: urpe@labornet.org

Managing Editor of RRPE

Hazel Dayton Gunn, Dept. of City and Regional Planning, 106 W. Sibley Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca NY 14853; E-mail: hg18@cornell.edu

Other URPE Positions

ASSA Coordinators Robin Hahnel and Kristen Sheeran, Dept. of Economics, American University, rhahnel@starpower.net; kasheeran@smcm.edu

Newsletter Editors Paddy Quick, paddyquick@aol.com; Jenny Brown, jbrown72073@cs.com

Economy Connection Coordinator Ruthie Indeck; 201-792-7459; soapbox@comcast.net

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URPE

The Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE) is a membership organization of academics and activists who share an interest in a radical analysis of political and economic topics. Founded in 1968, URPE's members use this analysis to advance various progressive political and social agendas. URPE publishes the *Review of Radical Political Economics*, runs a set of presentations at the academic professional meetings of the Allied Social Science Associations, sponsors a resource/speakers bureau called Economy Connection, and holds a Summer Conference on political and economic topics at a family-friendly summer camp. Its members are active in a wide array of professional and activist projects.

The URPE Newsletter

The **URPE Newsletter** is published quarterly by the Union for Radical Political Economics. The Newsletter is a place for URPE members to publish shorter articles and speeches as well as make announcements of upcoming events that might be of interest to members. Articles and announcements can be sent to the Newsletter Editor in the body of an e-mail message, or as an attached file; send to paddyquick@aol.com, or by regular mail to: *Paddy Quick, Economics Department, St. Francis College, 180 Remsen Street, Brooklyn NY 11201.*

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The URPE Newsletter is a good place to publish advertisements for new books! Rates are \$300 per full page (7.5W x 9.3H); \$160 for a half page, and \$85 for a quarter page. Exchange ads are also considered. Please write or call the National Office for more information on this.

Deadlines for submission to Newsletter are January 7 for winter issue; April 7 for spring issue; July 1 for summer issue, and October 7 for fall issue.

URPE at ASSA

Leanne Ussher

The American Economic Association, in conjunction with approximately 50 other economics associations, holds a three-day conference each year in January, formally known as the Allied Social Sciences Associations (ASSA) Conference. No doubt this is the biggest economics conference in the world, with 460 sessions and approximately 40 seminars in parallel sessions at any one time.

URPE had 18 sessions (4 were joint sessions with other organizations such as the International Association for Feminist Economics) whose topics are listed below:

- In the Commonwealth of Toil: A Roundtable on Massachusetts Labor Movements
- Labor in the Age of Neoliberal Globalization
- Border Crossings: Gender and Transnational Migration
- The Black Worker and Early Black Economic Thought
- Economics for Health and Environment
- Rethinking Economic Theory
- Questioning Paid Work: Benefits, Turnover, and Mobility of Low-Wage Women Workers
- Globalization, Investment, and Inequality
- When the Market Fails
- Social Security and Employer-Pension Reform
- Gender, Growth and Inequality
- In Celebration of John Kenneth Galbraith (Roundtable)
- Critiques of Neoliberal Globalization
- China and the Global Economy
- False Promises and Recurrent Crises
- Class, Distribution and Social Policy
- U.S. Macroeconomic Performance
- Studies in Capitalist Dynamics

All sessions were well attended (around 40-45 people for midday events). The papers and presenters in these sessions are listed at the ASSA program website:

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/AEA/assa06.htm>

URPE had far more sessions than some of her sister or similar size organizations such as (number of sessions in brackets) AFEE (13), MEEA (6), EPS (2), IAFFE (9), and HES (4). Indeed only 5 other organizations (of around 50) had more sessions than URPE. In terms of attendance URPE fared slightly better than MEEA and IAFFE but below that of EPS, AFEE and HES. This is partly due to the higher membership in the first two groups and the issue of war and the question of poverty that EPS has been able to showcase and tackle head on.

While it is difficult to generalize, it appears the quality of the papers and the degree of expertise of the presenters in the URPE sessions were exceptional. The papers were stimulating and well received by the audience. A very rough appraisal is that URPE performed slightly better than average compared with the previous several years (with the exception of the New York Conferences).

The URPE organization was busy from beginning to end. Not only were there seminars but there was the highly stimulating one-day pedagogy workshop organized by Jean Shackelford and others on the Thursday before the conference. And on the Saturday night there was the URPE cocktail hour(s)—crowded and full of conversation. Following this, URPE die-hards continued onto the ASSA URPE party at Julie Matthaei's house.

URPE economists who have been attending the ASSA conferences for some time felt that this year's mainstream events were more open than in previous years with more sessions being politically oriented and relevant to the current economic climate and the lives of the working class.

Global imbalances were a common subject. The international economics professor Jeffrey Frankel chaired more sessions than most for the AEA and he had various debates such as those on the US government deficit, the need to repeal the Bush tax cuts, and the upward adjustment of the Renimbi which it is believed is undervalued by around 40%. In an intense exchange among panelists Ronald McKinnon (from Stanford University) countered the majority by claiming that this was just China bashing, and compared it to the Japanese bashing that took place in 1978 – 1995 whereby US pressure led to the appreciation of the Yen and the demise of the Japanese economy. McKinnon contends that the same could occur for China.

Another common topic peppering the conference was that of Security and the Iraq War. Stiglitz presented his evaluation of the costs of the war which could top \$2 trillion. This was later publicized in the press. There were numerous sessions on global warming and policies that might rectify these events. Social Security was another hot topic, LERA had numerous sessions on labor, and there were one or two sessions on Katrina.

Indeed the URPE summer conference on *Nationalism, Internationalism and Nature*, pretty much sums up the headline talks within the macro community at the ASSA – global imbalances, nationalism, and global warming. The one current event missed by the ASSA was the new left movement in South America. You will have to come to the URPE summer conference to get updated on that.

Harry Magdoff... continued from page 1

were reprinted in *Imperialism Without Colonies* (2003).

Harry was a long-time member and supporter of URPE. He attended and spoke at numerous URPE events, including its Summer Conferences. One summer, during the 1980s, he led a workshop for children only, which introduced them to the basics of radical political economics. Through his written work, his talks, and his personal interactions he inspired generations of radical political economists, in the United States and throughout the world. That world is a better place because of him, and our grief at his passing is combined with a determination to continue to work for the goals we shared with him.

A moving tribute to Harry by Bob Pollin is available online at:

<http://www.counterpunch.org/pollin01062006.html>

—Paddy Quick

URPE Summer Conference moves to a new, spiffier camp!

The Steering Committee conducted a survey along with the elections, to find out whether the earliest date Camp Chinqueka had been able to give us meant some members couldn't attend. The answer was yes, quite a few. Plus Chinqueka wanted to raise our rates, much higher than we could afford. We were very lucky—after some serious searching—to find a camp that solves both those problems, and has more comfortable accommodations as well!

Camp Deer Run is just west of Pine Bush, NY, south of the Catskills, about 1 1/2 hours from New York City. It is not a Y camp, but part of an international organization called Dianova, “founded in France in 1972 with the objective of helping to build a better society around the world across ethnic, economic and cultural frontiers”—mainly through drug treatment and empowerment programs for youth. This facility specializes in a large ropes course, which however we won't be using.

The camp is available on our preferred dates, the second weekend in August. (We have tentatively reserved it for that time in 2007 as well.)

We will have full run of the place. The main building has a combination dining and plenary room with a big fireplace, a smaller meeting room, and clean indoor dorm rooms that generally sleep 4 people; some are for 8 and a few are for 2. There are normal bathrooms; no more sharing in big cabins (though some of us will miss that!) Outside the main building there is a big, covered congregating area. There are some smaller outbuildings with arts and crafts rooms usable for meetings or day care (one full of computers which MAY have broadband by then, which the office does have), and one meeting room has a really large-screen TV and theater seats, good for audiovisual presentations. Then there is a second building down the hill, near the large swimming pool, with a common room and more bedrooms.

The grounds are lovely; there is a hiking trail through the woods, and playground equipment and basketball etc. courts. There is no lake, but the pool has a large lawn around it, good for hanging out.

More pluses: it is fully accessible, the cooks are all trained at the Culinary Institute of America, the staff is very friendly, and some of the most spectacular scenery and hiking in the East is about 10 minutes' drive away at Sam's Point Preserve. Tenting should be more pleasant than at Chinqueka, also, because there is no traffic nearby. And we can party as loud and late as we want without disturbing the staff.

You can view photos of the camp at

www.pattyleep.smugmug.com/gallery/831355

The camp is not huge. There are ready beds for about 90 at a time, though they can make some more available in staff cabins if necessary. Also, they want to know the number of registrants well ahead of time, for food purchases. For these reasons we need to be more disciplined than in the past about advance registration.

The first year in a new location will inevitably require some improvisation but with your cooperation the steering committee will do its best to make the transition smooth. It should be a wonderful conference in a very pleasant location.

—Patty Lee Parmalee

Update on Economy Connection, URPE's Resource/Speakers Bureau

by Ruthie Indeck, Coordinator (201-792-7459 or soapbox@comcast.net)

Investment 101

"Making decisions about your retirement is no more difficult or mysterious than dealing with jobs or relationships, and it should become an integral part of your life," advised Max Fraad Wolff in a December "Investments 101" seminar for members of the Legal Services Staff Association. LSSA (UAW Local 2320) represents the overworked and underpaid attorneys and legal workers in the offices of Legal Services for New York, the largest provider of civil legal services to NYC's low-income communities. Pat Murray, head of the Retirement Planning Committee, explains that "we're put in a position of spending our working lives trying to act against the results of dividing people into the 'investor class' and the have-nots, while at the same time having to become investors to have a decent retirement."

Although Max did not give specific investment advice—he says there is no "magic bullet"—he gave an overview of the investment situation, prioritized the factors to consider when making investment decisions, presented detailed information on how various types of investments work, answered questions, handed out a list of useful websites, and even gave participants his email address! Here are Max's priorities determining how well you will do: 1. how much you invest; 2. the overall condition of the macro economy; 3. the inflation rate; 4. the diversity of choices (diversity is good); 5. the exact investment choices you make; 6. the fee structure; 7. the final tax burden; and 8. the type of plan you choose.

Later, seminar participants asked about the feasibility of socially responsible investment. Max mentioned several organizations and said that their earnings are generally on par with other actively managed funds, but that activists might not want to view their investments as their primary political activity. Max offered encouragement to consider political priorities, but only in the context of getting the best returns possible. Afterwards Pat commented: "What a great presentation that was! The buzz was all around the offices the next day."

National Wal-Mart Week in NJ

"If we punished worker rights' violations by companies as severely as we punish individuals, the company CEO and other top officials would be breaking rocks on some old-fashioned southern chain gang," Liza Featherstone told an audience of community members and students from County College of Morris, NJ. Liza is a freelance journalist and the author of *Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle for Worker's Rights at Wal-Mart*. The talk took place during "Wal-Mart week."

Liza spoke about blatant sex discrimination and other

workers' rights violations, and about low wages: full-time workers are still below the poverty level, and Wal-Mart, because of its size, sets the standard for national retail wages. She also talked about where consumers fit in, and how the activism around Wal-Mart provides an example of people questioning the workings of the contemporary economy.

The talk was organized by Jill Schennum, chair of County College's Sociology and Anthropology Department, and the audience included students in a Contemporary Social Issues class; these students had been studying Wal-Mart and were eager to discuss it. "Liza's accessible style and use of journalistic interviews and anecdotes to illustrate theoretical points worked well with our students," Jill noted. The talk also attracted an ex-Wal-Mart manager and others from the broader community, which has a strongly conservative orientation. Questions included: "Is Wal-Mart a Red-State/Blue State issue?" and "Conventional economists argue that discrimination is punished by the market, and therefore should eventually disappear — what do you think of this argument?"

For a detailed and colorful review of Liza's talk, see Colin Booth's article in County College's student newspaper: www.ccm.edu/campuslife/Nov23.pdf

Income Distribution & Poverty in the US

"The distribution of income in the U.S. in the early 2000s is about the most unequal it's ever been," writes Doug Henwood in a chapter on income in *After the New Economy*. He goes on to write about income in terms of race, class, and gender, giving a historical overview and explaining the economic dynamics that have led to inequality.

On November 10th, armed with charts, Doug condensed some of the information in his book into a talk at St. Francis College (Brooklyn).

About 40 students attended the talk, which was sponsored by the St. Francis Economic Society and organized by Yolanda Charley, an officer of the society. Yolanda reports that Doug gave an articulate and well-planned presentation. "He covered his points well and his delivery was clear. Some of the questions that were asked in the post-talk pertained to the current state of the New York economy. One student in particular asked about the American Dream and whether it was no longer a dream; he was assuming from Doug's talk that it wasn't."

Congratulations to Doug and Liza on the New Year's Day birth of their son, Ivan!

Social Security Talk on Long Island

Inspired by the frenzy of political activity to protect Social Security during the past year, Paddy Quick organized

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a talk at her library in Bellport, Long Island. Paddy reports that one audience member who spoke with her afterwards was really scared that she wouldn't be able to get her payments when she retired. "She left very, very happy knowing that it was all a big scare.

We had a good talk about how Bush was set on scaring people and destroying social security, and giving the right-wingers the opportunity to promote their dangerous ideology of individualism, including the idea that we have no responsibility to others." For more details on Social Security talks and testimony Paddy and others have given this year, see the URPE website:

<http://urpe.org/URPESSTalks.pdf> and <http://urpe.org/URPESSTest.pdf>.

NYC Independent

When the editors of *The Independent* put out a call for URPE members who could write on economic issues, twelve people responded. So far two articles have been published, and more are in the works. In the Nov. 9 issue, Alan Nasser and Steve Pressman each wrote a commentary on the Fed's policies, and on Greenspan's upcoming replacement by Bernanke.

Alan focused on the degree to which the US economy has been sustained by consumer spending in recent years, which in turn has been propped up by tremendous debt. This was facilitated by Fed policies that encouraged the growth of first the stock market bubble and then the housing bubble. Bernanke has said he will follow Greenspan's permissive policies toward bubbles; Alan concludes that "the consequences of this policy could spell an unprecedented disaster for working people."

On a more optimistic note, Steve criticizes Greenspan for loyally supporting regressive policies of several recent presidents, but feels that "we can expect better from Ben Bernanke. . . . Bernanke lacks right-wing ideological leanings."

And More!

Martin Melkonian gave a wonderful talk at the Brecht Forum on the role of military spending in keeping the economy going. He presented a historical overview of all the recessions that have occurred since the Great Depression, analyzing the varying degree to which military spending contributed to each recovery. EC could not find an economist to give a talk at a morning program for seniors in Bethlehem, PA, but with the help of new URPE member Edan Dhanraj, who comes from Bethlehem, we were able to recommend four progressive political scientists from nearby colleges.

EC suggested possible speakers to lead a workshop on wage discrimination by gender in Indiana; sent a list of contact people to a man who is fighting utility deregulation in Ohio; and sent a long list of people specializing in labor issues to a radio host in Oregon.

Call For Papers

Rethinking Marxism 2006

RETHINKING MARXISM: a journal of economics, culture & society is pleased to announce its 6th major international conference, to be held at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst on 26-28 October, 2006.

The conference is dedicated to the state of contemporary Marxism and its many current correlates and derivatives. The past few years have been fascinating and momentous for the fortunes of contemporary Marxism, as can be seen in the many theoretical traditions and activist movements that remain, in some way, inspired by and indebted to a wide range of Marxian ideas and strategies.

Rethinking Marxism 2006 will be held over three days, beginning on Thursday morning 26 October 2006 and ending on Saturday night 28 October 2006. In addition to three plenary sessions and performance art, there will be concurrent panels and art/cultural events. We invite the submission of pre-organized sessions that follow traditional or non-traditional formats (such as workshops, roundtables, and dialogue among and between presenters and audience). Since contemporary Marxism covers fields from literature to physics and forms of political practice from environmental organizing to opposing global inequality, anyone engaging with Marxism in any discipline or form of activism is encouraged to submit paper and panel proposals. We encourage paper and panel proposals from those working in areas that intersect with Marxism, such as feminism, political economy, cultural and literary studies, queer theory, working-class and labor studies, postcolonial studies, geography and urban studies, psychoanalysis, social and natural sciences, philosophy, and around issues of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, and disability. We welcome video, poetry, performance, and all other modes of presentation and cultural expression. We encourage paper or panel submissions from those working on any and all subjects that take an interest in a world without exploitation and oppression.

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

The deadline for proposal submission is **1 August 2006**.

The best way to submit a proposal and to pay the preregistration fee is to follow the instructions on the conference website:

<http://www.rethinkingmarxism2006.org/submission.html>.

You may also preregister and get more information at:

<http://www.rethinkingmarxism2006.org>

Imperialism and Human Rights

Kamran Nayeri

On November 3, the URPE listserv posted a message from Dean Baker about the detention of Berhanu Nega in Ethiopia. Berhanu Nega, a graduate of the New School for Social Research and a former economics professor at Bucknell University, was the mayor of Addis Ababa at the time of his arrest. Dean asked URPE members to write letters of protest on behalf of Nega and others arrested to the Ethiopian government. He also asked:

“Please contact your representatives in Congress and ask that they contact the State Department and express their concern about the human rights situation in Ethiopia. Also contact the State Department and ask them to express their concern over the imprisonment of the political opposition’s leadership.”

In my opinion this well intentioned appeal sets a dangerous precedent. Baker’s request implies that the US government can be a vehicle in the fight for human rights and that it should be urged to intervene in the internal affairs of another country. These presuppositions are wrong.

The truth is that the US government is by far the most powerful force on the world scale acting against human rights. In particular, it is the leading imperialist power that has worked over time to keep working people of the world in subjugation. Therefore, any consistent defense of human rights must rely on the self-organized and self-acting movement of working people who unconditionally oppose imperialist interventions everywhere.

Baker’s proposition runs counter to a growing mass consciousness in the United States and especially abroad that correctly views the US government as a prime violator of human rights. Consider the following short list that appeared recently in the mass media:

- The US government is openly proposing legalization of the use of torture against “suspected terrorists.”
- From Guantánamo to Abu-Ghraib, the US government runs prison complexes around the world that detain people illegally and torture them at will.
- US agents “secretly” kidnap “terrorist suspects” from countries around the world and some are held in CIA-run secret prison camps worldwide.
- The US government apprehends and sends “terrorist suspects” to countries like Syria and Egypt for interrogation where they are routinely tortured.
- The US administration has curtailed democratic rights at home. The Patriot Act voted into law by the politicians of both imperialist parties only codified and

accelerated the direction of the government in the US. The government has used widespread arbitrary wire-tapping by the National Security Agency, and US citizens who are declared “enemy combatants” are jailed without due process.

- The US leads the world in per capita prison population. There have been reports of abuse of prisoners in the mass media. The US is also a world leader in the use of the racist and classist death penalty.
- Political dissidents, such as Mumia Abu-Jamal, have been and are increasingly being framed and sentenced to long prison terms or death, and their legal representatives, such as Lynne Stewart, have been intimidated and jailed.
- The US government has been and is actively advocating terror against political leaders it opposes around the world. The case of Luis Posada Carriles offers a telling example. This Cuban-born Venezuelan citizen was instrumental in the bombing of a Cuban jetliner in 1976 that killed all 73 persons aboard. Posada, a CIA operative for years, has been protected by the US government and is currently in the country despite official requests by the government of Venezuela for his extradition to stand trial in the court of law. Meanwhile, the case of the Cuban Five demonstrates that those who uncover US-supported terror are framed up and railroaded.
- The US administration has increasingly opted for a colonial strategy of occupying entire countries from Afghanistan to Iraq, and demanded that other countries, such as Syria, Iran, Cuba, and Venezuela, follow its dictates or face similar consequences. For example, the US has an openly functioning “Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba” to foster an Iraq-style invasion of that country, and it has been plotting to overthrow the democratically elected Chavez government in Venezuela.

This short list is limited to political rights and doesn’t address the violation of other dimensions of human rights: from labor rights to the defense of the environment.

Thus, it would seem self-evident that the defense of human rights in Ethiopia cannot be effectively launched unless it begins with clear opposition to the world’s leading offender: the US government.

For those of us who live in the United States, the defense of human rights must begin at home. The American capitalist nation-state was built by colonial-settlers and its socioeconomic structure and political culture reflect this racist and imperialist character. Radical social change in the United States must confront this reality, root and branch.

Continued next page ...

Perhaps we can take a cue from Marx and Engels in their analysis of the rise of the British Empire and the struggle for socialism. Confronting the growth of reformism in the English labor movement, they identified the labor aristocracy as its agency and British industrial hegemony as its cause. They proposed that the future of socialism in England depended on the decline of British imperialist power and on the defense by the working class of the oppressed, especially the Irish (e.g., Engels 1885). The rise of reformism in the Second International resulted in the adoption of a “socialist colonial policy” that aimed at “humanizing” the “civilizing” impact of the European colonial conquest. This reformist degeneration led each Social Democratic party in Europe to support “its own” imperialist government in World War I. The Bolsheviks extended Marx’s and Engels’ analysis to explain the rise of reformism and national chauvinism in the Socialist International (Zinoviev 1916). These historical lessons were buried after the demise of the Russian revolution and the consolidation of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The US labor and socialist tradition was severely impacted so that reliance on the “lesser evil” in domestic policy and support for US intervention in foreign affairs are not the exception but the rule (e.g., Scipes 2005).

To advance the struggle for human rights, it is necessary to employ a strategy that builds a broad movement for self-organization, self-activity, and solidarity among the working people. A campaign for freedom of Berhanu Nega that builds on this foundation could begin among his peers and human rights organizations, and demand that the Ethiopian government release him and other political prisoners and respect their political and democratic rights. Such a campaign should make it clear that it opposes any imperial-

ist intervention in Ethiopia. In cases where repressive governments are close US allies (Israel) or US cronies (Egypt), it would be necessary to rally public opinion against the US government’s support.

For over 30 years, URPE has contributed to discussions on imperialism, its members have published books and articles on the topic, and frequently imperialism has been the topic of its summer conferences. It would appear self-evident that URPE should profess and practice a principled, unqualified anti-imperialist position, as it has also taken a principled and unqualified anti-racist and anti-sexist position. The present situation in the US and the world provides a challenge to and an opportunity for radicals to engage in resistance to the US capitalist offensive. The fight for human rights begins at home and should aim to strengthen emerging resistance to the government’s repressive policies. To extend this fight to the international arena it is necessary to wage it from a uncompromising anti-imperialist stand. The future, including that of URPE as a radical activist organization, depends on the outcome of the struggles of these contending forces in the US and worldwide.

Kamran Nayeri
University of California, Berkeley
knayeri@berkeley.edu
January 5, 2006

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Dean Baker responds:

The United States in Ethiopia

While I appreciate Kamran Nayeri’s concern that progressives should not want to see the United States intervening in other countries internal affairs, the fact is that the United States routinely does intervene in other country’s affairs and is currently intervening in the affairs of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia’s government joined the “Coalition of the Willing” that supported the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. It has since been dubbed by the Bush Administration as a “strategic partner” in the war on terrorism. It now pulls in \$160 million a year in non-food aid from the United States. It has also been favored by Bush’s ally, Tony Blair, as a reward for its support of Bush’s war.

Given that the U.S. is intervening (whether we like that fact or not—which I don’t), I fail to see what progressive goal we can possibly serve by not applying pressure on the United States to use its resources to stop the worst human

rights violations that might occur in Ethiopia. By Kamran’s logic, it was wrong to push for the U.S. government to reinstall Aristide as the democratically elected president of Haiti (after the first Bush administration had been complicit in the coup that displaced him). It is hard for me to see how the people of Haiti, or anywhere else in the world, would have been better served if Aristide had not regained power. (Of course Bush II has since removed him in another coup.)

I am glad to see the growth of progressive nationalist movements in Latin America and some of the other regions of the world, but for the foreseeable future, the United States is going to be a major actor in international affairs, and it will be intervening in other countries’ internal affairs. I don’t imagine that we will transform the State Department into a force for good in the world, but in certain cases where there is relatively little at stake for the United States militarily or economically, the U.S. can play a positive role. I am not worried that at some future date we will be tried because we tried to push U.S. intervention in a positive direction, even though what we really want is no intervention.

A letter on policy-making in URPE and responses from Steering Committee members.

Policy-making in URPE

Chris Gunn

As many members know, there was a concerted effort over the past two years by a couple of dozen longtime URPE members to change the URPE bylaws to mandate a mail ballot for election of the Steering Committee (SC). The old pattern was that the SC was elected at the summer conference business meeting, typically attended by no more than 25-30 members a year. The Editorial Board's recent use of a mail ballot has improved participation in elections to around 90 members, and now that the SC has changed to this process its election returns have reached the same numbers. This is progress, and if the SC continues use of the mail ballot there will be no need for the bylaw amendment.

In seeming violation of the spirit, at least, of the bylaws, the SC held the vote on the bylaw change—yes, you guessed it—at the summer conference. I asked for the results of the vote a few weeks after the conference and was told that the motion failed, but I would have to wait for the minutes of the meeting to get the numbers. Minutes were not available, but I was told that I would get them when they were written. Three months later I received a copy of the minutes third-hand. The news of the bylaw vote is instructive.

The motion to change the bylaws, submitted in conformity with them, was defeated by a vote of “9 in favor, 10 against, 2 abstaining.” The motion for the bylaw change had been submitted by 24 members! A few of them were at the meeting, and probably voted for it. Adding those who voted for it to those who submitted the motion, minus say three who overlap from these two groups, and the result is that approximately 30 supported the bylaw change, but they were “outvoted” by 10 who did not. This kind of “democracy” in URPE has to end. In addition, of course, somebody should have recognized that this meeting lacked the quorum specified in the bylaws for an annual membership meeting.

We have no idea how this vote would have gone if submitted to the full membership, but at least that might have been called a democratic process. It would also have reflected the seriousness of votes to change bylaws, for any organization. But the summer conference vote was another exercise by those who want to pump up the importance of the “business meeting” at the summer conference, and in

the process restrict voting to *true* (or whatever) members who attend the event.

URPE was/is a New Left organization, and the New Left stood for democracy, among other things. I hope we can practice what we preach. Until a new form of the URPE conference attracts a significant portion of its members, votes on policy matters should be by mail. The ballots for them can easily and inexpensively accompany the annual vote for Steering Committee members.

Responses from URPE Steering Committee Members:

Paddy Quick:

Chris Gunn proposed a by-law change which would have mandated the use of mail ballot for Steering Committee elections. Many URPE members supported this proposal, and the Steering Committee, in response to their concerns and acting on the basis of its own long-term deliberations on this question (which Chris Gunn had participated in) instituted a mail-ballot procedure for Steering Committee elections. The Steering Committee could not, of course, change the procedure laid down in the bylaws for an amendment to those bylaws and the amendment failed, both because it lacked a majority of votes cast, and, as Chris points out, because of the lack of a quorum. The Steering Committee is, however, happy to have been able to institute a change in the voting procedures which allows for more active participation of the members in the organization.

Chris Gunn is not satisfied. It seems that he has a more fundamental agenda in mind. He now argues that “votes on policy matters should be by mail,” and that this voting would take place once a year, at the same time as the Steering Committee elections. Not only would this be totally impractical (What is a “policy matter?” Who would decide on this? What about policy decisions that have to be made between these annual ballots?), it indicates a total lack of respect for the whole concept of democracy as embodied in the bylaws necessary for any organization.

URPE is a small organization, proud to be one of the few surviving organizations that grew out of the “New Left” of the 1960s-70s. As an organization, URPE has tried hard to act upon the principle of combining theory and practice. It has also continued to uphold the importance of participation as key to democracy. I join other members of the organization in looking forward to the more active participation

of our membership. I hope to see more members both running for offices in, and participating in the elections for, the URPE Steering Committee and the RRPE Editorial Board; I also look forward to more active discussions within URPE, not only of matters of internal organization, but of the important issues facing the world today, and of the role that URPE should play in confronting all forms of injustice.

Graham Cassano:

Once again, Professor Christopher Gunn has made the claim that the current steering committee represents an anti-democratic force in the organization. As a member of this committee, I must say that nothing could be further from the truth.

Most members of the steering committee serve URPE through a sense of obligation and duty. We believe in the work that URPE does and want the organization to be financially healthy, as well as a welcoming community to progressive political economists. Furthermore, our service comes at considerable personal expense. Most of us are in the academy. Some are at the start of our careers and, consequently, spend much time on our writing and research. Work for URPE takes time away from that writing, from our teaching, and from our various other academic responsibilities. We give our time freely, but I think it is worth noting that URPE adds to our already hectic and difficult to manage professional lives. None of this should come as a surprise. Nor is it surprising that we gain little or no personal benefit from our service. Obviously, we receive no financial compensation for the many hours of work we put in every year toward the maintenance and expansion of URPE's mission. But more than that, we receive no great symbolic or "psychological" wages for our work. The fact that we serve on URPE's steering committee hardly serves as a badge of honor on our curriculum vitas (though it probably should). Furthermore, since I myself am a sociologist, and not a professional economist, I don't even receive the mild symbolic (and potentially material) benefit provided by building a professional network of like-minded associates. In short, we have little incentive, either symbolic or financial, to corrupt and resist democratic procedures in the organization.

That this is the case can be further shown by the difficulty we have every year in recruiting new members of the steering committee. It seems that the URPE membership understands the substantial commitment involved in serving a term on the steering committee, and few have the time or the resources to devote themselves to this duty. On more than one occasion, I have approached former SC members to ask them to run again. The answer has often been: "Oh, I've already done my time on the SC."

What Professor Gunn identifies as a corruption of democratic procedure is, in fact, an honest and reasonable difference concerning the interpretation of the organization's bylaws. As those of us schooled in interpretive social theory understand, bureaucratic formulations are invariably open to contestable interpretive constructions. The current steering committee reads the bylaws through one such construction. Professor Gunn contests our construction. Fine. There is a thoroughly democratic procedure through which Professor Gunn may continue to argue for his own interpretation of the bylaws. He—and anyone else who favors his position—is free to run for election to the steering committee. We would welcome the extra help.

But to continue to portray the current steering committee as a quasi-Stalinist, anti-democratic cabal both misrepresents the facts and serves an insult in the face of our considerable sacrifices for the organization.

Yours in solidarity,

Graham Cassano

Leanne Ussher:

As a new member of the URPE steering committee it appears to me that URPE tries hard at being a democratic institution. As a representative democracy it is inclusive, transparent, and works hard to benefit its members despite the various and countervailing goals this implies. The Steering Committee (SC) representatives are voted in by the membership and then they decide on policy by majority vote in meetings. While I am acutely aware that different structures for electing and defining participation can lead to widely different outcomes, the manner in which URPE is structured seems reasonable and is definitely committed to the democratic process. For example, all nominations for membership on the Steering Committee are open to any URPE member; the voting process goes out of its way to have all members participate through a mail ballot (and this process is expected to continue); terms are instituted to stop the entrenchment of special interest groups, but those who are recognized by the membership as valuable can return through re-election.

As with all representative democracies, all policy decisions are made by the council of representatives, the SC, who also decides at their convenience when and where to have a meeting to allow for greatest participation. All Steering Committee meetings are open to observers and minutes are publicly available so that the process is transparent.

Continued on back cover...

URPE Membership

There are two types of membership in the Union for Radical Political Economics:

Full Membership with RRPE journal and Newsletter subscription

Limited Membership with Newsletter subscription only.

Both types of membership carry equal voting rights in URPE. (To participate in the URPE sessions at the Allied Social Science Associations meetings, you must be a member of URPE.)

Circle option chosen, and make checks payable to URPE.

Full Membership (includes one-year subscription to the *Review of Radical Political Economics* and the quarterly URPE Newsletter. Please note that RRPE subscriptions are entered on a calendar year basis.)

Low-income/student \$30

All other individuals \$55

Send **Full Membership** dues to:

Hazel Dayton Gunn
Dept. of City and Regional Planning
106 W. Sibley Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca NY 14853

Limited Membership (Includes subscription to the quarterly URPE Newsletter)

All individuals \$20

Send **Limited Membership** dues to:

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418 N. Pleasant Street
Amherst, MA 01002-1735

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Would you like your name and address to be listed in a Directory of URPE members? Yes/No

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Representatives are responsive to their constituents by bringing forth complaints or suggestions from URPE members. All policy decisions within the SC are voted on only when there is a quorum of representatives.

Annual Business Meetings take place for the entire URPE membership to discuss issues and vote on any number of these. Only at these meetings can URPE by-laws be modified through a popular vote; this allows for a discussion to take place beforehand. If there was a request for this to be rectified by admitting proxy votes (which itself is not a panacea for participation) I'm sure that this could be brought up at a meeting and voted on, as can any other URPE member's concerns.

No democracy is perfect, and we as a group need to be aware of our inadequacies and seek improvement through open and thoughtful discussion. If you have suggestions for improving our representative democracy please email me and I will present viable suggestions to the Steering Committee and Summer Conference Business Meeting for future review.

Leanne Ussher

Email: leanne.usshe@qc.cuny.edu

**Visit the URPE Website at
www.urpe.org**

Check out recent articles published in the *Review of Radical Political Economics* (RRPE).

Explore "Economy Connection" for references to materials on major issues, and information on how to get speakers to events.

See recent issues of the *URPE Newsletter*.

Get in touch with other organizations promoting heterodox economics.

Look for job listings for heterodox economists.

Keep up to date with plans for the 2006 URPE Summer Conference.

Contact us at: urpe@labornet.org