

# Oregon Socialist

<http://www.thesocialistparty.org/spo/index.html>

## 2005 SPUSA Convention Rears Its Ugly Head

by Michael C. Marino

JUST when you thought life couldn't get any worse, it turns out that the Socialist Party USA -- our blessed benefactors driven by their officers blessed with infinite wisdom (tell me if the sarcasm gets too thick) -- has scheduled a Convention for Newark, New Jersey for October 21-23. Conventions, rather than being used for fierce argument over divisions and planning massive movements and tactics, are now used for paperwork, petty bureaucracy, and elections reminiscent of electing your high school hall monitor.

Not one but several factions have emerged, each demanding a change, including the Debs Tendency (Trotskyists), the Grass Roots Tendency (Eric Chester), the Direct Action Tendency, and the recently-formed Fist and Rose Caucus. Opposing change and

trying to maintain power is the Comrades Caucus. A run-down of what info is available on these groups is kept on the SPO web page at:

<http://www.thesocialistparty.org/multi-tendency/index2.html>

If you are an SPUSA member, this mag should reach you with a ballot; please fill it out and send it soonest (due on 12<sup>th</sup>).

If you are not an SPUSA member, you have successfully dodged this one -- lucky you!

Donations gratefully accepted; we are hoping to send ten delegates to try to help clean up the current mess. Inquiries about the Convention, checks to help us cover costs, and the like can be sent to:

Socialist Party of Oregon, P.O. Box 5633, Portland, OR 97228

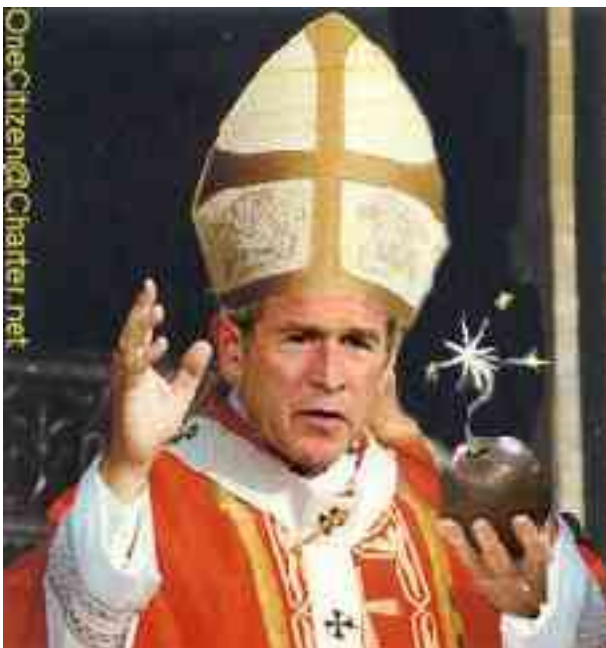
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## Critical Mass Corvallis

Friday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, 4:30pm  
Central Park on Monroe

A bicycle ride in celebration of bikes, bicyclists, our rights on the road, and non-car transportation.



## Pope Benedictus 0<sup>th</sup> Visits Washington

(AP) WASHINGTON, DC Pope George W. Benedictus the "0th" made a sudden and unexpected visit to the nation's capital on Friday, July 29. Claiming to be the original "zeroeth" Benedictus, the Pope appeared to be from another time, confused, disoriented, more than slightly Texan, and looking "very presidential". Before the Pope was escorted from Capitol Hill by some nice young men in white coats,

he told members of Congress that God had told him to instruct them not to vote for stem cell research, not to oppose the new Crusade in Iraq, and that they should tolerate gays but not allow them to marry.

Asked about Canada, the Pope merely said, "God doesn't appreciate what they done did."

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## ORGANIZING AND VOTER ED: TOUGH, TEDIOUS, AND VITAL

By Hunter Gray [Hunter Bear] Micmac / St Francis Abenaki / St Regis Mohawk

The post mortems on the Florida electoral situation of a year ago have been virtually endless. Calls for "reforms" -- generally statutory and Federal in nature -- have been frequent. All well and good but, to me and to many others, effective grassroots organizing is still the most basic dimension in achieving substantial victories -- whether political or otherwise.

In the realm of political action, this certainly applies whether one is functioning, say, within the Democratic party or the Green movements -- or from a Left related independent perspective.

As I see it -- and I've been a consistent social justice organizer since 1955 -- systematic and enduring grassroots organizing is Genesis. It's tedious, wearing, frustrating -- and absolutely crucial in the "Save the World Business." [Our very large social justice website -- [www.hunterbear.org](http://www.hunterbear.org) -- has much that relates to bona fide social justice organizing.]

An effective organizer seeks to get grassroots people together -- and does; develops on-going and democratic local leadership; deals effectively with grievances and individual/family concerns; works with the people to achieve basic organizational goals and develop new ones; and builds a sense of the New World To Come Over The Mountains Yonder -- and how all of that relates to the shorter term steps. An effective organizer has to be a person of integrity, courage, commitment. And a person of solidarity and sacrifice.

Let's take a look at the Florida situation -- recognizing that in that setting, as elsewhere, there has been nothing in recent times comparable to the massive obstacles to voter registration and voting that existed prior to the Civil Rights Movement [and many associated efforts] and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965: terror, economic reprisals, poll tax, "interpretation" requirements, "literacy" tests. There were obstacles in Election 2000 -- but nothing even remotely like the Bad Old Days.

In Florida [and in some other settings], the NAACP and comparable civil rights groups did an excellent job in registering new voters and they did a first-rate job in getting people to the polls.

But -- they fell down badly on the "middle piece" -- i.e., providing intensive voter education for the newly registered voters. They may have done a little of this but, frankly, not very much at all.

That piece of it -- intensive and thorough pre-election

voter education -- is hard and tedious. It involves everything from a massive, paper tornado of how-to-do-it-stuff and a flood of sample ballots, to role-playing, to basic and specific discussion of civil rights violations and what to do effectively about those. It's a matter of working very directly with the new registrants themselves -- but also training key community leaders -- e.g., clergy, teachers, civic organizational spokespersons, union leaders -- in order that they, too, can themselves provide accurate training directly to the new voters at the most basic grassroots level.

The other dimension involves developing an intricate network of trained poll-watchers and liaison people [the latter linked to private attorneys and Federal officials] in order to deal swiftly -- and as preventatively as possible -- with violations of voter rights.

And another piece is responding to the anticipated large turnout by effectively demanding, well in advance, that state officials set up additional polling places -- with up-to-date voting machines -- and to do whatever else is necessary to ensure that the election runs smoothly and fairly on all counts.

The adversaries will use every device and trick to void ballots and to otherwise sabotage the fairness of the election process. It's incumbent on our side to utilize every resource at our command to reduce this as much as possible -- and then to have the solid basis for effective legal and other protest in those instances where violations of voter rights do occur.

I initially learned about much of this, especially the voter registration part of it, when Arizona was using "literacy tests" and other devices to keep Chicanos and Native Americans from registering and voting -- a practice which was ended only by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. I cut my teeth on this as a kid at and around Flagstaff, where my parents were always very actively involved in these issues and battles.

And I personally learned a great deal about all of this -- hard-fought voter registration and education and related issues -- from the always excellent, very democratic and egalitarian, and quite radical International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in settings where much of our membership was Chicano and there were also significant numbers of Apache and Papago Indians, and some Navajo people.

And I learned an enormous amount about voter registration and voter education -- over many years --

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under extraordinarily difficult circumstances in the Southern Movement.

One of several cases in point:

In one of a number of hard-fought Southern campaigns -- focused initially on a very hard-core Klan-infested Blackbelt county [Halifax Co., N.C.] -- where virtually no Blacks or Indians had been able to register and vote since Reconstruction, we used a wide variety of resources. [I was the Field Organizer for the Southern Conference Educational Fund: grassroots civil rights and anti-Klan organizing.]

During an eight month period, I spoke to at least 250 meetings; we ran a large number of non-White candidates; used top-flight lawyers to win a major Federal voting order and forced the Justice Department into the situation; and we disseminated many thousands of pieces of mimeographed and printed literature.

We registered several thousand brand-new voters -- people who, certainly through no fault of their own, had never voted before in an official public election anywhere.

A major effort of ours focused on voter education: we brought the SCLC Citizenship School staff in from Savannah to help train local leaders to conduct grassroots gatherings on how-to-vote-effectively. We put out thousands more copies of our own material and used a great deal of stuff contributed by the AFL-CIO. During the various voting days -- two primaries and one general election -- we had, in addition to our own people as poll-watchers and "crisis runners" -- a large number of law students from Georgetown and Yale.

The "other side," of course, had a historically accumulated majority -- and our candidates did not win at that point. [But those tangible electoral victories certainly did come later.] What this effort did was to register thousands of new voters in one of the most repressive Southern counties and get them to the polls to vote in a series of elections -- with very few spoiled ballots.

We also used economic boycotts and militant nonviolent direct action on other, related issue fronts: e.g., segregated and substandard facilities, employment discrimination, police brutality, Klan terror, cheating of sharecroppers, surplus commodities for poor people -- and much, much more.

This campaign not only opened up Halifax County -- but was the major initial wedge of our intensive and broad-based campaign which then moved effectively across the geographically far-flung, multi-county Northeastern North Carolina Blackbelt.

We did this extensively in Chicago multi-issue block club organizing in the '70s -- where formal obstacles were not the problem but outright fraud certainly was -- via the Daley Machine. [I was Southside Director for the

Chicago Commons Association, a large private social justice organization.]

But we had significant successes -- including dumping a Daley Alderman and replacing him with a woman who was a Black Independent Democrat. There, too, careful organization -- and very careful voter education -- was the consistent key to victory. Another key was building bridges based on mutual goals, mutual respect, and enlightened self-interest between the various "ethnicities of the fewest alternatives" -- especially Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican.

There are many models for effective political action -- registration, voter education, voting: a myriad of effective organizing approaches over the epochs [settlement houses, unions, multi-issue community organization, some of the more tenacious radical groups, etc.]

Notable efforts specializing in this with respect to the Opening South of the 1960s and beyond involved the aforementioned Citizenship Schools pioneered by Mrs Septima Clark of SCLC, the Voter Education Project administered through the Southern Regional Council, and the veteran and still very much around Highlander Research and Education Center based in Tennessee [which, in its historic Southwide education campaigns, had initially trained Mrs Septima Clark herself.]

Next time around in this New Century, I'm sure there will be, All Over The Land, extensive voter registration and voter mobilization and organization and, in all great likelihood, very intensive voter education campaigns, and all of the other related dimensions that need to be pursued and pushed. But let's make absolutely sure this time -- and well in advance!

In Solidarity, Hunter Gray [Hunter Bear]

Note by Hunter Gray: DSA Anti-Racism Commission -- of which I'm Western regional coordinator -- has asked to use this material. I, of course, have gladly agreed. And, note by HG 3/05/03: It has just been published prominently on the website of the Commission -- which is linked to the main website of Democratic Socialists of America.

HUNTER GRAY [HUNTER BEAR]

[www.hunterbear.org](http://www.hunterbear.org)

When you cut to the bone and cut away the college degrees, academic and other titles, published books and articles, ours is essentially a working class and Indian family. We consistently join unions -- and we always support them with the greatest vigor.

It's critical to always keep fighting -- and to always remember that, if one lives with grace, he/she should be prepared to die with grace.

## from Bessie Smith to Dimitri Shostakovitch

by David McReynolds

A few weeks ago Charley Nims, a socialist in Portland, Oregon, called to ask me to write "something" about music for a socialist magazine there. He also wanted Quinn Brisben (former Socialist Party Presidential candidate) to write "something" about cinema. I'd send this to Charley by email, but he hasn't got an account (which, in this day and age, makes me wonder if he really exists). So I will print this out and send it to him - but I find writing something on Word Perfect more intimidating than just jotting these notes on email. It is cheating, and if I had a blog, I suspect that is where this belongs. There won't be spelling errors, but when I re-read these posts later I'm always irritated at obvious errors of grammar.

I send this out a bit nervously since on the "receiving end" are musicians and singers. If I'm going to write about music, why not start with them? But they are alive and well and can take care of themselves. Bessie and Dimitri are dead.

It was close to fifty years ago that I encountered the music of Bessie Smith. A friend had told me the songs were pretty raunchy. I listened, but monaural blues from the 1920's and 1930's was a world of its own, closed to me. The songs may have been raunchy but I wasn't impressed.

Until a party one night in Altadena, California, at the home of the late Ben Jackson. I got drunk. I wasn't yet a real drinker, so getting drunk meant getting poisoned and desperately sick. In addition, I was smoking. I left Ben's apt. and tried walking around the block, throwing up on every other front lawn, so sick that the only thing keeping me alive was the hope I might die. I made it back to my car, passed out there, and was rescued by one of the guys at the party, who managed to get me to his place and to a cot in his basement.

I woke in the morning, with a god-awful hangover, my mouth and nose reeking for vomit and stale cigarette smoke, to hear the music of Bessie Smith, which the guy was playing on a little 45 player (remember those 45's?). I heard Bessie, truly, for the first time. A middle class young white guy had entered the world of Bessie Smith and her blues.

There are times when, asked for my religion on government forms, I want to put down "Bessie Smith". James Baldwin took her records with him to Switzerland, when he was recovering from a nervous breakdown, playing them over and over. When things are really bad for me, I haul out my CD's of Bessie. I was later to learn more about jazz, not just Bessie. (One night my friends took me to a little jazz club in Westwood to hear Gerry Mulligan, then a new name. Chet Baker - young and stunningly good looking - dipped his reed in my glass of

water!). But my door to jazz was through the New Orleans blues of Bessie Smith. If you have never heard her, try. It may be necessary to smoke a joint, or listen to her when you've got a hangover. Bessie died in 1937, not that long after I was born. That would be my first musical note.

The other is to shift gears entirely to Dimitri Shostakovitch. There are those who believe Shostakovitch was the greatest composer of the 20th Century. I don't know enough about music to go there. I do know that his music is "of his time and place" and almost all the Western commentary on him misses that point. I probably have everything of his that has been recorded - I was a fan before he became "rehabilitated" in the West. The story of Shostakovitch tells us a great deal not only about how politics affected Soviet artists, but how politics affected US perception, and therefore is suitable for discussion in a socialist magazine.

The man was born in 1906, and died in 1975. He was only 11 when the Russian Revolution broke out. More than almost any other composer in the Soviet Union, his music reflected the hopes and the trajectory of the Revolution. He wrote fifteen symphonies, fifteen string quartets, concertos, operas, music for ballet, and, because as a "Soviet artist" he worked for the State, he produced music for films. Before World War II broke out, he had already found himself in serious trouble with the Party. To be "in trouble with the Party" was to be in very serious trouble - more than one major artist vanished into the Gulag or the grave. His trouble centered on the opera "Lady Macbeth", which had received great reviews in Leningrad, and was well received in Moscow until - or so the rumor goes - Stalin attended a performance and walked out in disgust. Pravda published scathing attacks. Shostakovitch put aside his Fourth Symphony, fearful it would result in his arrest (it was not performed until after Stalin's death) and, in 1937, in an effort to rehabilitate himself, wrote his Fifth Symphony, subtitled "A Soviet Artist's Reply To Just Criticism".

The Symphony was a success. Then came World War II. Caught in Leningrad by the Nazi advance (the siege of Leningrad is a terrible story - so terrible that I could not rejoice it was renamed "St. Petersburg" after the fall of the USSR. The horror of the three year siege had, I believe, meant the city should have kept the name). Shostakovitch began work on his Seventh Symphony. Moscow ordered his evacuation from Leningrad, and he completed the symphony elsewhere. The music was flown from the USSR, on a perilous war-time route, to the US where it had its premier. Shostakovitch was featured on the cover of Time magazine, fighting the fires in Leningrad during the Nazi attack.

We were, during the short period of 1942 to 1945, allies of the Soviet Union. This was the first time the West really heard his music. It was "approved" by our own State authorities. Because we live in a "free society" (no society, anywhere, at any time, is "free" of the pulse of events around it) we tend to think that the various lists of "great composers" or "One Hundred Essential Classical Works" are the product of thoughtful, unbiased critics. Not so. After the end of World War II, the great German conductor, Wilhelm Furtwangler, was essentially banned, becoming a kind of non-person until the early 1950's. Why? He never joined the Nazi party (unlike Herbert Van Karajan, who did join). Furtwangler was helpful to Jews in the orchestra. His crime was that he worked as a conductor under the Nazis. What was he supposed to have done? How many Americans left the US during Vietnam? How many of our critics and artists are leaving it now under Bush? Where are the Israelis who oppose the Occupation supposed to go? People live in a country, they speak its language, their family is there. They are "lodged by history" in the wrong place. We make a great mistake to judge individuals because they are caught up in the wrong country at the wrong time.

So with Shostakovich. He lent his name to various "peace offensives" by the Soviet Union, in 1949 traveling to the US to take part in such an event. Late in life, after Stalin's death, he joined the Communist Party. He was first and foremost a composer, one who sometimes took extraordinary risks as seen in the context of Soviet society. Shostakovich was not Jewish, but his music returned again and again to Jewish themes (his Piano Trio #2, the Babi Yar Symphony, etc.).

But in the West, once World War II was over and the Cold War began, it is interesting to see how critics suddenly found his symphonies bombastic, propagandistic, shallow, worthy of derision. If you looked at a list of "100 essential classical recordings" you would find Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, etc. - but usually just one of Shostakovich's symphonies (his Fifth). Then in 1979 Solomon Volkov published "Testimony", allegedly authorized by Shostakovich. Volkov gave us a new picture of the composer as a dissident, a bitter opponent of Stalin and the entire Soviet system. Thus Shostakovich goes from largely unknown (up to World War II), a great composer (World War II period), to sycophant of Stalinism (after World War II, up to his death), to being a kind of secret dissident.

Volkov's work has since been largely dismissed by critics. Shostakovich's own links with the book are now sharply questioned. Perhaps only a truly great composer is worth so much fuss, on one side or the other, to make him "fit" some political framework. Shostakovich fit no political framework - he was a child of the hopes and tragedies of the Soviet Union. Just as one cannot easily capture the chilling nature of Soviet totalitarianism (several of Shostakovich's friends and relatives were

killed during the first "great terror"), and it is this aspect of Soviet life which most Western observers see, there is the other aspect of the Soviet Union - the hopes it held out, the utopia it had sought to build, even the freedom which many artists felt early in the life of the Soviet Union, the freedom to create along new lines. Soviet film, paintings, literature, and music in the 1920's were wonderfully inventive, at least as much as anything being done in the West. The revolution was genuine. The repressions didn't begin until the 1930's. Shostakovich was a man of those times, exposed both to the freedom of the revolution, and then to the terror.

But missing from almost all the discussion about Shostakovich, missing from the questions about why his later music seems "darker" than his earlier works, is the war. This was a man who was in Leningrad during the siege, in Moscow when Nazi tanks rolled within sight of the Kremlin. A war which took the lives of more than twenty million Soviet citizens, and did not take them "neatly", but like carving lives out of the flesh of a society, leaving orphans, widows, ruined buildings, terrible wounds, bleeding.

About the time he had come under sharp attack for his opera "Lady Macbeth", and felt compelled to write the Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich began to write string quartets. These were largely overlooked in the West, but if one is looking for the "real" Shostakovich, I'd search these quartets. There are fifteen of them, and they "deepen" as they approach the final two quartets. Some have linked them with Beethoven's last quartets - music of a man at the end of his own time, haunted by the tragedies of a lifetime. I doubt anything sadder than his Sonata for Viola, Opus 147, can be found in music. The final Symphony, the 15th, still baffles critics who wonder if it was a "joke". The last movement of the symphony, in which all gives way to a chilling series of drum beats, and bells, is hardly the end of a symphony to which we are accustomed. I think I do understand the 15th Symphony - it is Shostakovich at the edge of death, looking back, as he does in the final quartets, with memories of great joy, of loss, and of the closing of life.

But listen for yourself. Start with the Piano Trio #2, or the String Quartets. By no means is all of Shostakovich's music "great" or even good. But listen by yourself to the Seventh Symphony and you can hear the advance of the Nazis troops. Or in the Eighth Symphony, you can hear the howling of pain and anguish about what humanity does to itself - not just Stalin's repressions, as Volkov would have us believe, but war. Most important, listen. This was a man who lived in the midst of revolution, war, and terror such as none of his Western critics have endured.

He speaks for our time. His residence was Moscow - his music is universal.

David McReynolds

NYC June 16, 2005

## Palestine v. Argentina

by Alexandra Maximoff

I have in my hand a copy of "A Jewish State", the 1904 edition of an 1899 publication.

In it Theodor Herzl proposes that the dispersed and hounded Jewish population relocate to a common homeland, and discusses how the move and nation could be financed and governed. (He wasn't the first to describe this, but he didn't know about the other guys: Pinsker, Hess, Eisler.)

He puts question marks after Argentina or Palestine as home, and suggests prospecting: offering the skill sets of the Jews to the governments of other countries in exchange for land to live on. Beginning in the 1800's many Jews did emigrate to Argentina and founded colonies there.

In 1903, Herzl brought the proposal of Uganda as

homeland to the Sixth Zionist Congress.

Uganda had been "offered" by the British as a temporary home for Russian and European Jews. The Russian delegation to the Congress angrily refused this offer, walked out of the convention and threatened they wouldn't return for the Seventh Congress unless this plan was abandoned.

Many of the Zionists of this era were socialists, although Jewish history.org writes that the communists called the Jews capitalists and the capitalists claimed Jews were communists.

Herzl proposed two frameworks for the new country; a company wealthy Jews could invest in, and a professional civil government.

**The Socialist Party of Oregon maintains an Internet archive of materials on the Israel-Palestinian conflict, including historical and news items, editorials, and activist links. It can be found at:**

**<http://www.thesocialistparty.org/archive/israel/index.html>**

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