

Oregon Socialist

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SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZING AND THE CHURCH

by Hunter Gray

SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZING AND THE CHURCH [And Religion, Tribalism, And Socialism] [And With A 12/31/01 Follow-Up - Hunter Gray] UP DATE 4/03/05

Social Justice Organizing and the Church [Much More than Craw Dads]

NOTE BY HUNTER BEAR 4/03/05

Any Native person today is confronted with much that is non-Indian. As a consequence, while maintaining our own basic identity, we do develop a sense of tolerance, if not outright respect, for many differing points of view. But I think matters go even deeper: Almost always fundamentally spiritual, Native people especially respect the religious views of others -- whoever the others may be. On the matter of the LDS church, I often think of Dr [PhD] Bahe Billy, Dean of the Shiprock campus of Navajo Community College [now Dine' College] for many years. Bahe Billy is a most traditional Navajo as well as a Bishop [local ward leader] in the Mormon Church.

But virulent anti-Catholicism has recently broken out in several ostensibly radical quarters -- some of it so rank in its

verbiage and ungrounded implications ["papists"] that I have automatically recalled some of the old-time Klan tracts in such settings as Mississippi and Eastern North Carolina and elsewhere. [I have noted that other, thoughtful radicals -- some very possibly non-believers themselves -- have endeavored to clarify matters in a commendably helpful fashion.]

How any social justice organizer could ever hope to win over grassroots people while expounding stridently anti-religious views is a Great Mystery. I can only conclude that those poisonously verbose folks have never even organized craw-dads in a bathtub.

Anyway, here is my post on all of this from awhile back:

One of the more consistent proofs I've seen of the durability and fertility of religion is its oft-spectacular proliferation as a vigorous -- sometimes wildly emotional -- discussional topic. This is true for a very wide range of people -- and it certainly applies to radical, social justice activists.

And then there's the even more provocative question of, "Can a militant radical who is fundamentally

committed to substantive social justice accomplish anything "within" the institutional Church -- and can he/she survive there over the long haul?"

Let me tell you.

For myself, I certainly have no apologies whatsoever of that which I'm certain is my own inherent spiritual dimension -- manifested in our interesting family/tribal blending of the traditional beliefs with some of the more attractive facets of Jesuit Catholicism. I should add that Ignatius of Loyola -- he of single-minded and super-intensive organizational commitment [whatever his own historical goals] is for us a special entity. I have a large personal library replete with works on American and Canadian and Mexican radicalism and much, much indeed on Native American matters. And I have a great deal from other parts of the Earth. Several works of and about Ignatius are immediately adjacent to my 45 volumes of Lenin [no two volume index with my set.] I'd say that Lenin and Ignatius certainly have something in common.

I certainly don't feel that a spiritual dimension is anything except intricately correlated with that dimension of ours which demands material well-being. And I certainly think we have a liberty-seeking fire as well. I'd say that all of these are fused together beyond any precise analysis.

And I don't think for a moment that anyone in the history of Humanity -- or any group or tendency -- has captured the entire complexity of the Cosmos and all of its components [and all of these components, in my view, are intricately linked.] And, by the way, the existence of certain parapsychological phenomena -- e.g., telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis [psychokinesis], precognition -- have been very well established under rigid lab

conditions. [I've been a member of the American Society for Psychical Research for many decades.] But these, always known consciously by tribal people and found, in my opinion, in all humans -- however cloaked they may be in the superficialities of "western" science -- cannot be put as formulae on blackboards. I think the case for "survival of the human personality beyond bodily death" has been at least fairly well established by parapsychologists. But, presumptuous as it may sound, most humans know this anyway and most of us aren't inclined to think too much at this point about what lies beyond the Fog.

But I do state, and categorically, that I'm alive today because of certain clear and overwhelmingly intuitive warning feelings.

Anyway, I certainly do indeed think that religion -- or the lack of it -- is up to the individual. And I certainly say emphatically that any really working organizer seeking to get grassroots people together, develop on-going and democratic local leadership, deal effectively with grievances and individual/family concerns, achieve basic organizational goals and develop new ones -- and build a sense of the New World To Be Over The Mountains Yonder and how all of this relates to shorter-term steps -- can hardly afford, whatever the organizer's particular stand on religion may be, to become involved in his constituents' views on religion.

The institutional Church [or church] can indeed be something else. I parted company with that in the summer of 1978 at Rochester, New York. For the better part of the two previous years, I'd been Director of the Office of Human Development, the social justice arm of the twelve country Rochester Catholic Diocese. For years it had been a mostly talk

situation -- and I was hired because part of the staff genuinely wanted to do some genuinely tangible things [and the Church bureaucracy was unaware of what bona fide community organization really meant!] We moved quickly on a number of fronts: organized Native mink-skinners [in some of the most repressive, feudal conditions I'd seen since the Deep South] into successful strike actions; launched all sorts of effective grassroots single-issue and multi-issue projects; developed meaningful and effective liaisons with union labor [and I was a prime organizer and co-chair of the regional Labor Law Reform Committee -- seeking strong pro-union legislation]; pushed international justice issues [Chile, southern Africa, Panama] and actively supported the Iroquois land claims cases -- all of these both directly and through the New York State Catholic Committee; vigorously supported gay rights; and we did much else.

And we also pushed hard for the socialization of utilities power -- the people-gouging [super-gouging] Rochester Gas and Electric -- whose board chairman, we knew, was the biggest single contributor to the Diocese.

Tension between our bona fide social justice organizing and fighting -- and the institutional Church -- had been growing steadily as Church politicians began to realize what we were doing via the Office of Human Development. I was given a series of ultimatums which, of course, I ignored -- and, in due course, I was fired by the Bishop's hatchet-man for "insubordination" [later changed to "a breakdown in communication."]

There was a hell of a grassroots protest through the remainder of the Summer of 1978: Native organizations, grassroots groups, the 89 unions making up the Rochester Central Labor Council and the Teamsters Union; many

Diocese organizer

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle 8/78

Rally asks reinstatement

BY TERRY SPENCER

The former head of the Catholic Worker in Rochester, a man widely hailed as a saint, was asked to be reinstated to his position as diocesan organizer if he will renounce his political beliefs.

John Salter, 57, was fired from his position as diocesan organizer of the Diocese of Rochester in 1977. He was accused of being a Communist agent.

Salter, 57, a Whitehall factory and the coalition of workers, headed by Western Labor League of Our St. Ed. He has asked to meet with Bishop Salter to discuss his reinstatement.

been indicated.

Salter said yesterday he will continue his organizing efforts even if he is not reinstated. But he believes the diocese will continue to be criticized for his firing.

The Rev. Francis J. Sullivan, director of the Office of Social Ministry and Worker's supervisor, strongly denies that Salter was fired because of his organizing efforts and says his political beliefs were not a factor.

Sullivan and Salter was fired from his position last year because he was a poor administrator.

At Salter's rally, Alan J. Kelly, director of Labor Ministry, said he was authorized by AFL-CIO and Touhy local chapters to endorse Salter and urge his reinstatement.

Edward P. Kelly, a spokesman for the area Indian community, praised Salter and criticized the diocese for its lack of support.

Kelly urged other community groups and churches to pressure Salter's reinstatement and addition to assembly the changes of poor administration.



John Salter, fired by diocese

inner-city parish priests and nuns; faculty from St. Bernard's Seminary; the Diocesan canon lawyer; Episcopal clergy; the Catholic Worker movement. The widely read National Catholic Reporter devoted much of an entire issue to the Rochester upheaval. The Bishop took early retirement; his hatchet-man [rumored to be his successor] was passed over and relegated in due course to an obscure rural parish.

I was never, not surprisingly, reinstated -- my growing family and I went on to the Navajo Nation -- but we did accomplish some solid victories on the New York scene and we sowed many

seeds of discontent. We hear from time to time of those emergent fruits.

Would I work again for the institutional Church? No. Am I still aware of my spiritual dimension. Of course. And I will always be so aware.

Traditional Native tribalism [communalistic] -- and this holds true, I should think, for Fourth World peoples generally, has been characterized by the primary principle of "tribal responsibility:" i.e., the group has a responsibility to the individual and the individual has a responsibility to the group. It's a deeply-rooted mutual kind of thing -- with a recognition that, at least for the most

part, what is good for the group is good for the person. There is, on the one hand, a recognition that, if the well-being of the group and the self-perceived well-being of the individual come into conflict, the group-good transcends the situation. But there is always, in the traditional tribal context, certain clearly defined areas of individual and family autonomy into which the group cannot intrude.

All of this has enabled tribal peoples across the world to survive the blood-dimmed centuries of attempted physical and cultural genocide.

When Father Thomas J. Hagerty, the revolver-packing priest of the

Western Federation of Miners, wrote out the preamble of the embryonic Industrial Workers of the World in 1905, his creation -- however inspired -- started off, of course, with "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common." For my part, I read that preamble decades later when I was a teenager and, shortly thereafter, I did the Communist Manifesto. To me, at least, it all goes together, along with the foundation dimensions -- the sensible balance between group and individual -- of Native tribalism.

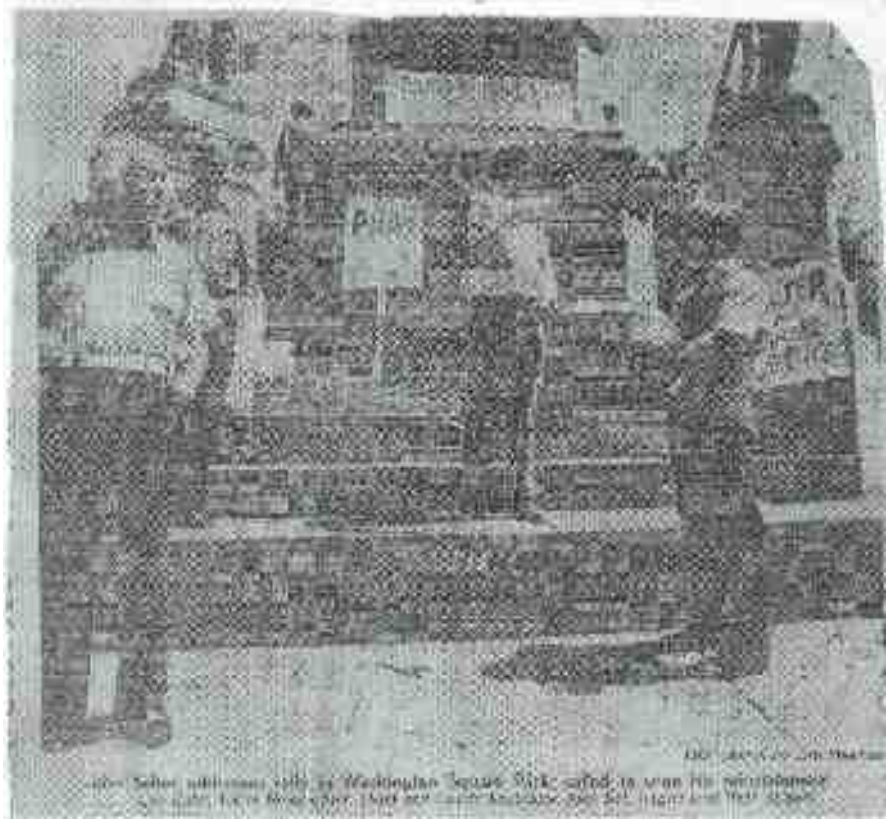
And hopefully, this will all add up to a socialism where people are

genuinely free in all respects and where their choices are many indeed.

Hunter Gray

One of many protest rallies on behalf of me -- and continuing social justice activism:

caption: Speakers [left to right] Alex Gaby, Editor of Labor News [Rochester Central Labor Council]; Jack Skvorak, leader of Metro-Act [large community organization]; John Salter [HG]; John Garibaldi-Erb [Democratic political actionist and county legislator.]



Melvin Little Explains Socialism (for ages 10 to 70)

by Melvin Little

DARREN LYLE WRITES: If a ten year old child asked you to explain socialism and communism, how would you do it?

MELVIN LITTLE REPLIES: If a 10 year old, a 45 year old, or a 70 year old asked me to explain the difference between *socialism* and *communism*, I would tell them that the difference can be summed up in one word. Democracy. By democracy, I am not talking about the "false democracy" that exists in America. A society where trade unions are almost non-existent, with the absence of a universal healthcare system, the ongoing practice of the death penalty, and a one party state pretending to be a two party state does not appeal to me one bit. It is just as non-appealing as the command economy, one party system, and the micro-management of the individual that existed in the former Soviet Union. As a *socialist*, neither the American capitalist nor the Soviet

communist model appeal to me.

I usually refer to center left governments as *socialist* governments. Some would contradict me and say that places like Sweden, Spain, and New Zealand are *social democracies* and not *socialist* countries. Well to me, *social democracy* and *socialism* mean the same thing. No matter how pure any movement is, powers tend to moderate in democracies. If any movement comes in and tries to implement their ideas through force, then their movement loses the right to call itself "democratic."

Socialism should go further than strong trade unions, socialized medicine, the welfare state, and civil liberties; there should be a fundamental commitment to make all these societies with center left governments bring about *socialism* in its purest sense through democratic means. When

it is done by force, I repeat that it ceases to be democratic. Does that commitment mean that *socialists* should evolutionarily create a "command economy?" The answer is no. A mixed economy works, and there should be structures set up whereby workers get a greater participation and more democratic say. This can be done through both cooperatives and regulation of private corporations. As long as EVERYONE is entitled to a living wage job, then *socialism* becomes more of a reality.

For Bread, Red Roses, and Peaceful Revolutions!

Melvin Little

Democratic Socialists of America
American Civil Liberties Union
United Food & Commercial Workers

"I would never trade one form of tyranny for another."

---Tommy Douglas

Happenings...

Critical Mass in Corvallis

July 28th, August 25th, September 29th, 4:30pm
Central Park on Monroe
A bicycle ride in celebration of bikes, bicyclists, our rights on the road, and non-car transportation.

Critical Mass in Vancouver

September 25th
Esther Short Park
A celebratory bicycle ride through Vancouver. Everyone is welcome. It starts at 5:30 PM at Esther Short Park. Please come if you have a bicycle and like to ride.

Willamette Valley Independent Media project

July 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th, August 5th, 10:30am
2nd Street Low Beanery, Corvallis
Ongoing discussion on expanding media access to the people.

Portland

The magazine *Portland Socialist* carries a monthly listing of actions and events in Portland; it can be found on-line at our web site. Yes, you can download it (freeeeee!), or you can have a copy ,mailed by buying s subscription.

Willamette Valley Local

For upcoming meetings and events, contact the Mid-Willamette Local at:

Mid-Willamette Local
c/o Bob Rossi
P.O. Box 2766
Salem, OR 97308
rjrossi@opeuseiu.com

New activity in Eugene reported, but no specific SP events.

No activity reported in Helen Keller Memorial Local; termination of the Local pending.

No news from Clackamas, other than that the Clackamas County contact is perpetually sick.

United for Peace and Justice

Submitted by Linda Gail Richard

Dear Friends,

*Since September 11th, 2001, the Bush Administration has tried to wrap its bloody warmongering in stars and stripes.

* During the nearly five years of manipulation and fear that have followed, the White House was waged war on the Constitution and some of the principles upon which this country was founded. They launched an illegal, immoral invasion and occupation based on lies, which has killed more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians and 2,500 U.S. soldiers; authorized warrantless wiretaps; demonized and persecuted immigrants; incarcerated individuals indefinitely without charge and denied them due process. And questioning or challenging any of the above has

been called "un-American" and "unpatriotic."

/*Not any more. */

This 4th of July people across the country will be standing up to declare a solemn and critical demand: "Bring the Troops Home Now." We encourage you to join your neighbors in standing up for peace.

* You can *start or join a peace vigil this holiday weekend*, or join the peace contingent in your community's July 4th parade.

* Many elected officials and people running for office will be making public appearances at July 4th activities: Don't be shy about asking them what they are going to do to end the war and bring our troops home now.

Www.unitedforpeace.org/

Whatever Happened to... are any more problems.

Oregon Socialist?

By Michael C. Marino

You would be very astute and correct if you noticed that this is the first issue of *Oregon Socialist* to come out in a long time. Computer failures and other technical problems have been a constant roadblock. A Comrade asked the National Committee of the SPUSA if they could help out, and they generously pitched in a few chuckles.

[To NC: Thanks, guys.]

The time comes when a person has to admit that the computer from 1993 (as opposed to my other computer which was from 1994) just doesn't cut it any more. All machines have been replaced with new and upgraded and useful tools. Yes, the guilt is killing me, but it should be quite a while before there

So: here it is, your copy of *Oregon Socialist*. I am slowly and steadily updating the web site, as well.

Portland Socialist has resumed. Some of the information sources I used to use have dried up.

The upcoming campaign season promises to be very demanding on time, financial resources, and energy. If you are interested in running for office, please come to the Convention scheduled for July 23.

Speaking of Conventions: time has slipped during the latest computer disaster, and the various elected committees and such have all had terms slip along with the time. There are several things happening at once, as it may appear from looking at the Socialist Meetings on the back page: we are catching up on what we need to have done.

Solidarity, Michael

Socialist Party Meetings in Oregon

Sunday, July 9, 2pm-4pm – Socialist Party USA (Oregon Chapter) meets at Northwest Library, 2300 NW Thurman. All SPUSA members who are no more than six months in arrears in dues have a vote (but the National Office *really* appreciates it when we are not in arrears for such long periods of time – a blue dot by your address marks that, according to their records, it is time to pay some dues).

Sunday, July 16, 1pm-3pm – Socialist Party of Multnomah County meets at the Belmont Library, 1038 SE Belmont. The current focus of the SPMC is the Carolina Brigades project: by working with Free Geek, we hope to repair or “adopt” (by contributing enough volunteer hours) enough working computers to send a big shipment of them to South Carolina, where they have economic oppression a-plenty (even worse than here, if you can imagine...).

Sunday, July 23, 2pm-4pm, Central Library, 810 SW

10th. This is a formal and legal and all that meeting for nominating candidates to the ballot within the 3rd Congressional District in Oregon. Only persons registered Socialist in the 3rd Congressional District have a vote here. We shall also be electing a new Action Committee, or re-electing the one we have now. Endorsements for measures, other candidates, and suchlike, should be raised here.

Several copies of *Oregon Socialist* are going out with a voter registration form; for those interested in registering Socialist, this is the form for you! If you are already registered Socialist, please consider registering the nearest neighbor, spouse, cousin, random passerby, grocery clerk, or whoever you find handy.

Oregon Socialist and *Portland Socialist* can both be downloaded from our web page and printed out if you need any extra hand-outs to use to show people what the Socialist Party is up to and what it's all about.

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