

Oregon Socialist

<http://www.thesocialistparty.org/>

Winter 2007

- **Working Meetings by Eric Bagai**
- **Speech Ban Won't End Racism by John Salter [Hunter Gray]**
- **Happenings...**
- **Rageh in Iran by Vancouver for Peace**
- **Socialist Party USA 2007 Convention**
- **The Triumph of Homophony by Michael C. Marino**

"The rich are tolerable only so long as their gains appear to bear some relation to roughly what they have contributed to society. Think of it as proportional and justified economic success. This can be tolerated by poor and middle class people if they believe the economic system is fair and properly rewards those who work harder or have better capabilities. But truly obscene economic rewards angers people. When most prosperity and wealth is unfairly channeled to relatively few Upper Class people, it is only a matter of time until fuming, resentful people in the Lower Class decide enough is enough and revolt, perhaps violently, if the political system remains controlled by the Upper Class." -John Maynard Keynes

"Do not waste your time on Social Questions. What is the matter with the poor is Poverty; what is the matter with the rich is Uselessness." -George Bernard Shaw

Oregon Socialist is published irregularly (we aim for quarterly) by the Socialist Party of Oregon, PO Box 5633, Portland, OR 97228. Office number: (503) 241-8217. FAX: (503) 675-0587. Electronic mail: info@thesocialistparty.org. National affiliate: Socialist Party USA.

Socialist Party USA 2007 Convention

Every other year, Socialists of the SPUSA variety flock to a city somewhere within the continental U.S. of A. and take over a hotel, liberating its workers, and commence to pass great and mighty resolutions which thunder through the heavens.

And *this* is one of those years:

October 19-21, 2007

Socialist Party USA
National Convention

St. Louis Missouri

All invited.

The number of delegates we shall be getting is not determined yet, but the process for becoming a delegate should be brought up early so everyone gets to know ahead of time what's up.

All dues-paying members are eligible to serve as delegates. Nominations can be submitted to your Local, by your Local, by any member, etc., in writing to:

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

In the Spring issue (already late and getting later by the day!) of *Oregon Socialist* comes out, you will get a list of declared candidates to date, and a ballot form; the ballots cast will rank delegates, then the state

Convention makes the final recommendation to the State Committee based on who accepts nomination, and such, and the State Committee makes the finalized determination based on who back out at the last minute or becomes available and any problems with the National Office on membership status, etc.

In other words: the membership gets to vote because we want a democratic representation of views, and then we have some internal bureaucracy that makes adjustments as we find out who can afford to go and who can't, and whether or not we are meeting the gender parity rules and other SPUSA requirements.

SPUSA is working on a travel subsidy plan. The Convention Planning Committee is looking at publishing the application form in upcoming issues of *Hammer and Tongs*, *Socialist Women*, and on-line; if we get a copy, it will also be in *Oregon Socialist* (and probably in other state affiliates' newsletters), as well.

If interested in going, check your calendars, check the airfares, and consider your finances – and start by nominating yourself or another SPUSA member to be a delegate.

Working Committees

by Eric Bagai

As promised a week or so ago, here's my suggested plan of action for the Socialist Party in the US and all its various US iterations.

Change the nature of monthly or bi-weekly membership meetings into Working Meetings.

Begin with small things. Begin with household chores at the home where the meeting is held: emptying trash, vacuuming rugs, sweeping the porch, weeding, etc.

Some meetings should concentrate on a joint effort at a single task, such as painting a shed or a room.

All members should be pre-assigned a roughly equivalent task that is proportional to their abilities for each meeting. Everyone should know what they will be doing before they come. Those who cannot attend should make an appointment to do their task at a mutually convenient time. Members may trade tasks.

Each meeting should be held at a different member's house, so that all may benefit.

Consideration and analysis of work done and to be done should be an ongoing item of agenda at meetings, but should never take more than one fifth of the total time allowed for any working meeting. Self-criticism and constructive suggestion should be encouraged as it is much more useful than disparagement, which should be discouraged but given a fair but brief hearing. Discourage analysis without action, rule-making, power accumulation, and all the behavior typical before working meetings were initiated. Concentrate on what physically needs to be done. Then do it.

Eventually the group will come to meetings with the expectation of doing something worthwhile, no matter how trivial, and come away from meetings with a feeling of accomplishment, no matter how small. This is an unusual feeling for an American Socialist, but with continued application and encouragement, it can become a normal part of their lives.

After a time, the members will begin to enjoy working together for a common good and will take pride in their group's achievement and in their own part in it.

Sooner or later the membership will express an interest in doing work outside of their own homes. This is the beginning of social consciousness, which is the foundation of socialism. Groups should consider what work can be done that can be accomplished in a few hours, and that will have an observable effect on the neighborhood -- just like the house and yard work they have been doing in each others' homes.

Some work will soon be seen as requiring several meetings to accomplish, or need daily or weekly application. This is fine if the membership is up for it.

Each group will find it has a unique range of interest: street cleaning, graffiti removal, helping the elderly, conducting neighborhood conflict resolution clinics, doing habitat for humanity construction, stream restoration, kudzu or English Ivy removal, military counseling, consumer counseling, and so on.

When a group's current selection of work is completed, is no longer needed, or has proven untenable or

counterproductive, they should congratulate themselves appropriately and begin new work immediately. If nothing comes to mind, the group should return to doing basic household tasks. This will help the membership to more readily recognize when it's time to move on in other tasks, what it is possible to accomplish, and to more quickly recognize how much can reasonably be accomplished with the resources at their disposal. Perhaps these understandings will generalize to other areas of their political and personal lives.

The more the group becomes intimately involved in the needs and problems of its community, the more effective it will be come at finding solutions and resolutions. In some groups this may lead to city, state, or national action. But Working Meetings must always begin with and be grounded in the most basic and needed actions recognized by the group.

The SP, along with much of the left, both secular and religious, has concentrated for too long on repetitive behavior as a means of making their will felt, much like the continual rocking of the autistic. Unless such behavior produces immediate and visible change, it should be discarded. To continue purposeless behavior may be comforting, but it is still without purpose and a signal to the world of your irrelevance. Work done for one's own spiritual enlightenment or religious edification is simply another form of self-gratification, and is not a useful or lasting basis for developing fairness or equity, or for meeting community needs.

Traditional protests, leafleting, vigils, and rallies should be recognized as, at best social

functions, and at worst as replacing good work with inefficient or even pointless work. When you rally in a park, also have a party or dance, and then clean up the park and sweep the street. When you protest the behavior of a congressman, wash his windows, empty his trash, vacuum his rugs, and invite him or her (and staff) to join you for a drink at the local pub.

This all seems simpleminded and petty when weighed against the problems of our nation. But consider what socialists have in fact been able to accomplish, which is damned little, actually. Even though the concepts of socialist fairness and equity have become a part of American economic and political reality, socialists themselves have had little effect of

the issues of any day.

The Working Meeting is an attempt to return to the best precepts of American Socialism: fairness and equity, good work and immediately observable results.

These are the things that attracted the working class to socialism, and made proud and determined traitors of middle and upper class discontents. The economic theories of Marx have mired us in analysis instead of action, relection instead of work. Most self-declared socialists no longer think of themselves as Marxists. At the same time, the Democratic Party has adopted the socialist guise and words of fairness, equity, good work, and observable results, while systematically betraying their meaning.

We must return to our roots and rediscover what made socialism attractive. Begin small. Do needed work. Explore what then becomes possible.

I have sent this to the same people who received my earlier post, which I took from one of Michael Marino's lists. These and a number of other essays, screeds, and ego-trips can be found on my Tribe page and blog, which is accessed at no cost through www.tribe.net, and a search on my name.

Permission to reprint is usually granted, but should not be assumed.

Cheers,
=Eric Bagai

SPEECH BAN WON'T END RACISM

by John R Salter, Jr [Hunter Gray]

(Originally published in DAKOTA STUDENT 4/30/91)

I wrote the following letter [under my original name of John R Salter, Jr] and published it in The Dakota Student [University of North Dakota] on April 30, 1991. I was not surprised that it angered a number of administrators as well as some faculty. The UND student response -- across all sorts of racial/ethnic/ cultural lines -- was extremely positive. My letter was subsequently published in the May / June 1991 issue of the excellent socialist journal, Against the Current, under the title, "Defeat Racism, Don't Censor It."

I stand, of course, by every word I said, then and right to the present moment.

I'm completely against any efforts to ban racist or sexist speech, or any other speech, on college and university campuses -- or anywhere

else.

I speak as both activist and academic and as one who has been involved in social justice pursuits and teaching since the mid-1950s.

American Indians have traditionally recognized the right of everyone to be heard -- no matter how unpopular or even noxious the verbiage. Whatever its many limitations, my native state of Arizona has never deteriorated -- despite the presence of the copper bosses and the farming magnates, among others -- into the sort of closed society once exemplified by Mississippi. In part, at least, this has been because of the libertarian traditions of a far-ranging frontier where "things open out instead of in" and where free speech has generally, however grudgingly, been respected or at least tolerated.

I've never known any effort anywhere to ban speech that really "worked." I've known few such efforts that, sooner or later, weren't turned against the advocates of constructive social change. Hell, look at human history.

Frankly, some of the most sanctimonious proponents of suppression of racist and sexist speech in university settings have been, in my observation, administrators whose real commitment to, say, affirmative action has been Zero -- and who frequently have worked against anything of a tangible nature that would increase the numbers and morale of women and minorities in meaningful positions. Other, more well meaning official folk, worry about "negative speech," expressing their concerns in the context and

style of a prattling timidity that brings out the worst in everyone.

Here at the University of North Dakota, in a state and region where Native Americans are the most substantial minority, our Department of American Indian Studies offers several sections of a course called Introduction to Indian Studies -- which fulfills a state teacher certification necessity and also meets certain humanities and social science requirements. About 350 students per year pass through these courses [I teach 200 or so personally]; the majority are Anglo, with a good number of American Indians and other minorities represented. In this classroom setting, academic dimensions are heavily laced with confronting all kinds of people hang-ups and we deal with these in a non-guilt-trip, "say what you please" hang-loose sort of atmosphere.

This works -- and often these students go on to take other courses of ours, such as Contemporary Indian Issues or Federal Indian Law and Policy or Plains Indians. Common interests, common concerns, and common allies surface.

And in many other sectors, in and out of the university setting, we challenge all kinds of anti-people words and deeds and patterns. We've done it openly and candidly -- and without tearing people down. Our efforts are interracial and intercultural.

We've seen things improve enlightenment-wise with the students, considerably so, and with many townspeople. But we still have a long, long way to go in getting minorities and women hired in solid and influential university positions. Academics -- including academic liberals -- are certainly often harder to deal with than an essentially nice Anglo kid who has some hang-ups.

The kid is usually honest enough to face up and change, given a firm push or two or three -- done in a friendly fashion.

We just have to keep fighting, all of us together, step by step. But let's not waste time on dangerous gimmicks like gag laws and regulations. The real prize lies "over the mountains yonder" and we can catch it -- if we don't allow

ourselves to be de-railed and diverted into the canyons.

[Editor's note: Salter is chairman of the Indian Studies Department.]

HUNTER GRAY [HUNTER BEAR/JOHN R SALTER JR] Mi'kmaq /St. Francis Abenaki/St. Regis Mohawk Protected by Na'shdo'í'ba'í' and Ohkwari'

Check out our Hunterbear social justice website: www.hunterbear.org

[The site is dedicated to our one-half Bobcat, Cloudy Gray: http://hunterbear.org/cloudy_gray.htm

In our Gray Hole, the ghosts often dance in the junipers and sage, on the game trails, in the tributary canyons with the thick red maples, and on the high windy ridges -- and they dance from within the very essence of our own inner being. They do this especially when the bright night moon shines down on the clean white snow that covers the valley and its surroundings. Then it is as bright as day -- but in an always soft and mysterious and remembering way. [Hunter Bear]

The Triumph of Homophony

by Michael C. Marino

The recent incursion of the utterly insignificant matter with Imus and unfortunate matter with a frat school raised much Internet guess work and prominent statements by folks who wanted to let us know that they were, indeed, *not* racist or in favour of racism.

As is the usual course of things, Gangsta Rap eventually got the blame. It is my contention that Gangsta Rap is not the cause of all our societal ills, cotrary to popular

belief, but is the obvious (and foreseen by the academic world) outcome of the Triumph of Homophony.

Because nearly everyone gives me an odd look when I discuss the topic of homophony, let's clarify what music is, who invented it, and what the words mean. Homophony is not gay music, no.

This is most easily explained by the development of music to its

present form:

Monophonic music: We begin in places like Greece of many years ago. Monophonic music means, yes, one melody line. Whether a lyre, a flute, pipes, every piece of music was just one melody. If a lyre played at the same time as a flute, they played the exact same notes in simultaneous manner.

Greek music theory is extensive; they worked really hard at finding

as many ways as possible of making a single melody line as good as it could be, because, well, that was all they had going on much of the time. (Yes, it is true that the modern scale is a perversion of the original mathematical one developed by Pythagoras – harmony was hardly unknown to the Greeks, they were one of several cultures which independently discovered it.) Toward the end of the classic Greeks, they started writing heterophonic music (no joke, that is what it is called): two or more instruments follow *almost* the exact same melody line, but one instrument sometimes strays a bit and has a slightly different melodic phrase now and then, something that makes the pipes a bit more yearning than the flute or whatever. I never studied the theory directly; it's all Greek to me. I only studied music history for this period.

Over many years, this remained the way it was done, until popular music became feasible by virtue of having more people in smaller geographies (with instruments), and inventions like the virginal and pipe organ had come into existence: why play just the same melody line? Why use only one hand? Why not use both hands on the keyboard and have the left hand play something slightly different? Why not play one thing with the flute while we do something entirely different with the mandolin?

An amazing diversity of uninteresting ideas ensued.

Per Luigi da Palestrina died. I did not mention the part about him being born, because nobody noticed that. It was his death and what happened subsequently that got people's attention: his music was played long after his death; nobody could write better. A careful study was made of his music (they went

and waited until after his death to realize he knew his stuff... sheesh...).

Palestrina did not invent the idea of playing two melodies at the same time; he did not even invent the idea of harmony. But he combined those ideas, so that the two (or more) melodies played left every note, point against point, making a harmony with the other melodic lines.

He developed what came to be termed "strict counterpoint". A listener hears two melodies, essentially two entirely different songs, played simultaneously, and designed to create a blend that is pleasing to the ear. What seems to be the physical mechanism of this is that the ear picks up melody #1 and melody #2, and assembles them to make melody #3 – hence, people who want smart kids make them listen to Mozart: it triggers a part of the brain to start working on synthesis. There are many rules to the system, which Palestrina never wrote up himself, but which he used in every piece of work, perhaps several dozen ideas borrowed from all over the music landscape, and merged into a systematic way of writing music.

This takes us into the start of the classical era: strict rules, symmetric creations, multiple melody lines that work together to produce a harmonic line: polyphonic music had arrived in force.

Although Palestrina is pretty much undisputed as the master of counterpoint (his version, anyway), he was followed toward the end by Buxtehude (whose imagination is just unfair!) and Bach -- Bach, who invented "free counterpoint". (The differences between strict and free counterpoint are really better explained by somebody who is much better at explaining the part about "why free counterpoint is

better for you than Vitamins.'')

With Bach's death came a decline in polyphony, although Bach, himself, was never all that popular during his lifetime.

The thing that had been invented to make two different melodies possible to play at the same time, harmony, became more the focus, and the actual melodic lines became less of the focus. The Romantic Era destroyed the Baroque Era and succeeding generations of music have, ever since, destroyed more of the heritage and tradition of creating music that is actually pleasant.

The focus on harmony eventually led to homophony: one, single melodic line, with harmonic accompaniment. Reduced from four or more melodic lines down to but one, this simplification of music had disturbed a lot of people (other than me, even) for many years. We know how to write multiple melodic lines together, but few do so. The experiments by Vierne and Hindmith (and too many others) are best regarded as jokes. (And, even better, forgotten, which they largely have been.)

Harmony, quite obviously, is not a bad thing, it just isn't something that gets anyone's interest, really, or gets their blood going. It is far preferable to disharmony, but harmony, itself, is but one of three primary characteristics of music: melody, harmony, rhythm.

Weakening the role that melody has to play (and modern melodies are often so simplistic and repetitive that they are barely melodies) is like taking a painter's palette and telling him/her that one of the primary colours just has to go.

The worry that has long been expressed in academia is that homophonic music will get to the point at which it will eliminate

melody entirely. I think that there are plenty of songs that already count as having done that.

The music, and even the vocal style, of rap music, is the result of the steady progression from polyphonic music to homophonic music. Homophonic music has had a steadily decreasing use of melody since it began to rise in popularity, and the removal of such an important ingredient from the sauce -- as music theorists have warned since before you, gentle reader, was born -- indicated a march toward the doom of music as something anybody would actually want to listen to.

Homophony is the basic element of Gangsta rap, and much other modern music. The vocals, by remaining mostly flat, mirror the focus on the elimination of melody. It is, of course, quite possible to talk in, for example, B minor, but that's not singing; that's talking in B minor.

The downward trend of culture of any kind in most of modern music can be linked quite easily to the erosion of melodic devices in favour of harmonic and rhythmic devices: melody, more than harmony or rhythm, stimulates the brain. Harmony mostly relaxes the brain (harmonically-challenged stuff that uses too much discord and dissonance can agitate the brain, of course); rhythm keeps the sense of motion going, and there are, to be sure, a great many complex rhythmic schemata that have been used -- it is merely the inability of rhythm to replace melody that is of concern.

Here is one of the many ways that melody causes the brain to work harder: take that most basic of all chords, C-E-G. If, instead of playing that chord, a pianist, instead, plays each note in succession, C, then E, then G, the brain assembles the notes and interprets it as being the chord C-E-

G. What is more, there is a near universality about music: a song that sounds "sad" in India may sound unusual in more than a few ways, but the underlying element of sadness tends to be cross-cultural. If it is a lively Japanese folk piece, it will sound somewhat lively when played before a British crowd. Music, through melody, has not only the property of stimulating the brain, but it also has something of an ability to act almost as a universal language.

Since I am a slavish devotee of polyphony, which I am sure does not show, I am biased against ALL homophonic music, not just that used in Gangsta Rap. However, the slow death of melody has been going on for many years, people have seen it, we warned ya, and now we get to see the results: yes, indeed, music that makes you stupid (homophony) leads to people who say and do stupid things. At the same time, we are seeing a greater use of television (which has a similar negative impact on the brain) over film (which has a stimulating effect on the brain).

In the technology and in its use, movies and music, very critical things for they play such a big role in our culture [sic], are leading the way to intellectual graveyards and the birth of lyrics like, "Welllllll, I'm Easy E, I got bitches galore/ you might think you have a lot of bitches, but I got much more." (And even from there, it continues to go downhill.)

We can hardly blame Gangsta Rap for the invention of bad lyrics. Heck, we've had bad lyrics ever since language was invented (and we are still regretting that mistake, aren't we?)

So: Why is entertainment so bad?

Making better movies, better music, and so on, is not too difficult. Plenty of talent out there.

But here is where we run into another problem: the entertainment that has the widest appeal gets the most funding to produce. "What has the widest appeal" usually means "bland and inoffensive". So, here we can put our generic blame on capitalism, although doing so does not absolve the musicians in question from the penalties they deserve.

Oddly, Gangsta Rap is not bland, and it is offensive -- in the lyrics. But the music is homophonic: nothing but the volume to cause offense. There also is not very much of it, compared to the rest of the ick out there. We can not lay all the ills of society at the door of Gangsta Rap.

There should be no question regarding its popularity: no matter how many cities enact "rap-free zone" ordinances, no matter how much public scorn and ridicule we dump on its fans, they stick to their guns, or, if we are lucky, to their boom boxes.

The dumbing down of the arts is present throughout society; it is not a localized event. It does not apply to only one field of art, or to only one geographic domain. Pretty much, we have a worldwide collapse, yet another race to the bottom, with what is done right being tossed aside for what is new and runs on the latest electronics.

But, of course, we're considering Gangsta Rap and why it makes you stupid versus why intricate melodic work makes people smart. Well, it just does, and my descriptions may be 100% wrong, but I know what I like.

I am willing to put up with Gangsta Rap if they is okay wif puttin' up wif me blatin' my Beethoven out my box while I is walkin' to dey Gangsta Rap music sto'. I say fair is fair and enuff iz enuff.

Happenings...

Critical Mass in Corvallis

Corvallis (Oregon) **Critical Mass** celebrates alternative transportation with a progressive community bike ride every last Friday of the month. Meet in **Central Park at 5:30 pm** (17:30). Bring your bike, wild attire, audible utensils, and enthusiasm. (Also a light during shorter daylight months) Feel free to check out past photos, print flyers, make a bike route, and more on this site. Email batman@peak.org or join the discussion list for more information.

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 a subscription.

Willamette Valley Local

Saturday, May 12: Forum on labor and globalization, starting at 2pm at the Anderson Conference Rooms of the Salem Public Library, 585 Liberty St. SE.

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@navicom.com

New activity in Eugene/Lane County reported.

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

No news from Clackamas, but we are seeing some of their members starting to show up again at Multnomah County meetings.

The People

by Tomasso Campanella

As translated from the Italian poem, "The People," by John Addington Symonds

The people is a beast of muddy brain
That knows not its own force, and therefore stands
Loaded with wood and stone; the powerless hands
Of a mere child guide it with bit and rein;

One kick would be enough to break the chain;
But the beast fears, and what the child demands,
It does; nor its own terror understands,
Confused and stupified by bugbears vain.

Most wonderful! with its own hands it ties
And gags itself-gives itself death and war
For pence doled out by kings from its own store.

Its own are all things between earth and heaven;
But this it knows not; and if one arise
To tell this truth, it kills him unforgiven.

Pay for American college presidents over the past decade has jumped seven times faster than pay for college faculty. In 1996, only one college president took home over \$500,000. In 2006, 112 college presidents hit that mark. Meanwhile, after inflation, compensation for college professors increased just 5 percent since 1996. And college students have faced rapidly mounting tuition far higher than inflation rates.

Power concedes nothing without a demand.

It never has, and it never will.

If there is no struggle, there is no progress.

Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation are

men who

want crops without plowing the ground. They want rain without

thunder and

lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its waters.

-- Frederick Douglass

Vancouver for Peace
TUESDAY, MAY 22, 7:00 p.m.

RAGEH: INSIDE IRAN

A BBC Documentary

St. Lukes Episcopal Church, 420 E. Fourth Plain Blvd

Rageh Omaar embarks on a unique journey inside what he describes as one of the most misunderstood countries in the world, looking at the country through the eyes of people rarely heard - ordinary Iranians. It took a year of wrangling to get permission to film inside Iran but the result is an amazing portrayal of an energetic and vibrant country that is completely different to the usual images seen in the media.

A country of contrasts

Rageh soon discovers that Tehran is a complex place and uncovers a city of extremes of wealth and poverty, where some people survive on less than a dollar a day and others shop till they drop in glitzy shopping malls. Iran is a country that bans women from riding motorcycles but where 60 per cent of the student population is female. It is also a youthful place, with two thirds of Iran's 70 million population under the age of 30.

Local stories

Rageh meets with local people to hear their personal stories and feelings about the current state of affairs in Iran. There are stories of taxi drivers, wrestlers, business women, people working with drug addicts and the country's leading pop star and his manager - the 'Simon Cowell' of Iran.

Rageh Inside Iran transcends images of angry demonstrations and burning flags to reveal a country that isn't without its problems but which is also fascinating, dynamic and hospitable.

Video Runtime 98 Minutes

"War is the inevitable result of two capitalists trying to negotiate a deal that is to their mutual benefit." -Tiamat Kam'en'ehar

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