

# Planning the Counterattack Against Radical Conservatism

JERRY KLOBY

(Institute for Community Studies, Montclair, New Jersey)

*The Great Divide: Retro vs. Metro America*, by John Sperling, Suzanne Helburn, Samuel George, John Morris and Carl Hunt. Sausalito, CA: PoliPointPress, 2004. 296 pp. \$19.95 (paper). ISBN: 0-976021-0-0.

*What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, by Thomas Frank. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004. 320 pp. \$24.00 (cloth). ISBN: 0-8050-7339-6. \$14.00 (paper). ISBN: 0-8050-7774-X.

*Reason: Why Liberals Will Win the Battle for America*, by Robert Reich. New York: Knopf, 2004. 272 pp. \$24.00 (cloth). ISBN: 1-4000-4221-6. \$14.00 (paper). ISBN: 1-4000-7660-9.

Watching the best sellers list can be an interesting pastime. Over the past few years the non-fiction category has become a bit like a horse race. Conservatives have been producing a steady stream of books telling Americans about the 100 people who are “screwing up” their country and that we need to “be delivered” from the treasonous evils of liberalism. Liberals and progressives have landed quite a few counterpunches against these “lying liars” of the “culture wars.” Some of the leftish books rise above the fray. They go beyond simply countering the distortions made by the right wing to offering thought-provoking analysis of the recent rise of the political right in the United States, and, in some cases, proposing a strategy for corrective action. This essay examines three such books, all of which shed some light on why the right has been so successful and offer some ideas for a strategic counteroffensive.

Easily the most impressive of the three, at least in terms of research and visual presentation, is *The Great Divide* authored by John Sperling et al. Sperling is probably best known as the founder of the University of Phoenix, which provides college degrees via internet-based courses. Sperling has his hand in a number of other businesses as well, and was named one of the top twenty-five entrepreneurs of the past twenty-five years by *Inc.* magazine.

Robert Reich's *Reason* is a more subdued and readable book that does not overwhelm the reader. Reich has held numerous positions in the federal government including secretary of labor under President Clinton. He has authored ten books including the well-known *I'll Be Short: Essentials for a Decent Working Society* (2002).

Thomas Frank, the author of *What's the Matter with Kansas?* is not a businessman or a former high-ranking government official. He is a journalist, the founding editor of *The Baffler* (a magazine of cultural criticism established in 1988), the author of *One Market Under God*, a frequent contributor to *The Nation*, *Harper's*, and *Le Monde diplomatique*, and a native of Kansas.

The books reflect their author's biographies. *The Great Divide* is an oversized, glossy, well-financed publication, by a team of writers and researchers. In style and substance it reflects its progressive-minded business roots. Reich's book, *Reason*, is much more modest. It is written in the friendly, engaging style of an experienced politician who has a knack for making you feel that he is talking directly to you, not down at you. Frank's book makes you appreciate journalists – something that is hard to do these days. He brings the reader's attention to Kansas's progressive roots, while asking: what happened to Kansas that moved it from those progressive roots to a place where the majority consistently votes against its class interests? His analysis is witty, deep, and clearly focused on the class divisions that exist in the United States, divisions that Sperling et al., and Reich, to some extent, gloss over.

The authors all have concerns about the direction that the United States is headed and, for most of them, those concerns include questions about the future of the Democratic Party. Not since Nixon's defeat of McGovern have the Democrats been forced to reflect so much on who they are and where they want to go.

*The Great Divide* argues that American politics can best be analyzed by seeing the United States as a divided nation. One is traditional, rooted in the past – Retro. The other is modern and focused on the future – Metro. Retro America's chief characteristics include: religiosity, social conservatism, an economic base of extraction industries, agriculture, non-durable goods manufacturing, military installations, and a commitment to the Republican Party. Its 25 states encompass 66 percent of the land mass and 35 percent of the population.

Metro America, on the other hand, is loosely held together by a common interest in promoting economic modernity and by shared cultural values marked by religious moderation, vibrant popular cultures, a tolerance of differences of class, ethnicity, tastes, and sexual orientation, and a tendency to vote Democratic. Metro America has 34 percent of the land mass and 65 percent of the population – 70 percent of the metropolitan population.

Sperling and his colleagues claim that “culture and economics are the major elements that determine voting behavior and, in turn, shape the ideology and organization of the Republican and Democratic Parties” (p. xvii). However, to a large extent they view the *geographic* distribution of political power as a determining factor in shaping the electorate and the two major parties.

Retro America is the America favored by the Republican Party and, according to Sperling et al., Retro America is on the dole. What the authors term “retronomics” is supported by two pillars: 1) the extraction industries (oil, gas, mining and forestry) and agriculture, and 2) national political power based on the alliance between the Southern, Prairie, and Rocky Mountain states. The political alliance ensures a flow of subsidies for the extraction industries and the siting of federal facilities – military bases, shipyards, atomic energy, and military testing grounds. As a result of this alliance, Retro America received US\$ 800 billion more in federal payments than it paid in taxes for the years 1991 to 2000. Conversely, the 23 Metro states paid US\$ 1.4 trillion more in taxes than they received back from the federal government. In other words, Retro America enjoyed an advantage of US\$ 2.2 trillion over Metro America. More to the point, perhaps, is that the excess in spending compared to tax receipts is not due to higher federal assistance to the poor (with the exception of New Mexico), but to the greater subsidies paid to the extraction industries (oil, mining, lumber) and agriculture.

Many metro states pay much more in federal taxes than they receive back from the federal government. For example, from 1991 to 2001, New Jersey paid an excess of US\$ 265.4 billion, California paid US\$ 253.5 billion over what it received in subsidies, Illinois paid US\$ 252.7 billion more, and New York paid US\$ 242.2 billion. Per family, the biggest losers are Connecticut (US\$ 116,179), New Jersey (US\$ 97,559) and Nevada (US\$ 67,125). Ironically, the blue states are subsidizing Retro America, leading some to refer to the Retro states as the “red ink” states.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term is from Ken Cook, director of the Environmental Working Group. See Egan (2004).

*The Great Divide* is a very useful resource for documenting some telling differences between the Republican and Democratic Parties in terms of their representativeness. For instance, of the 278 Republicans in the 108th Congress, 252 were male and just 26 female. In other words, only 9.4 percent of the Republicans in Congress are female, compared to 18.4 percent of Democrats. In addition, 98.6 percent of Republicans are white, compared to 79.1 percent of Democrats.<sup>2</sup>

Sperling et al., find much of the conservatism of Retro America rooted in its Christian fundamentalist base – a base that has a significant hold on the country at large. They cite an ABC News poll that found 60 percent of American adults believe the Bible is literally true, including its story of the world being created in six days, and a Pew poll finding that 36 percent believe God gave Israel to the Jews and “the state of Israel is a fulfillment of the biblical prophecy about the second coming of Jesus.” The fundamentalists’ faith in their beliefs leads to inflexibility. In the words of the authors: “. . . there is arrogance and a false sense of superiority because the Bible tells humans that they are to have dominion over all the plants and the animals and are empowered to do with them what they will” (pp. 74–74 [??AU: check page range]).

Reading *The Great Divide*, one can’t help but wonder why the Democrats did not take advantage of Bush’s poor performance record in his home state. For example, Texas has the dirtiest air in the country, it ranks forty-seventh in water quality, and has the seventh highest rate of release of toxic industrial byproducts. Texas also has the greatest proportion, nearly 25 percent, of residents without health insurance coverage (US Census Bureau 2004:25).

The State’s Republican Party platform itself might have been enough to deter many voters from pulling the lever for George W. Among the planks in the state platform are:

- Nullify the separation of Church and State.
- The Census Bureau should only determine [sic] the number of people in a dwelling.
- Repeal the 16th amendment authorizing the income tax.
- Oppose the theory of global warming.
- Oppose the Endangered Species Act.
- Repeal the minimum-wage law.
- Replace Social Security with a system of private pensions.

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<sup>2</sup> Overall, only 13 percent of those in Congress are minorities, compared to 31 percent of the population at large.

- Oppose women's right to abortion.
- Abolish the US Department of Education.
- Teachers should be encouraged to teach Creationism, not Darwinian evolutionary theory or a scientific world view (p. 69).

In terms of political strategy, *The Great Divide* calls for the Democrats to present a clear identity. The authors claim that the Republicans have established themselves as the party of Retro America and the Democrats must respond by becoming the party of Metro America. In contrast to the Republican values often expressed as “God, Family, and Flag,” the *Great Divide* suggests the Democratic “brand” express the values of “Inclusion, Science, and Security.” The identity can be promoted by adopting a strategy that is “future-oriented, fair, and revives our belief in government as the upholder of the public interests” (p. 236). Such a strategy, they claim, will solidify the base of the party – union families, people of color, women, and people of all ethnicities who live in cosmopolitan areas.

How does one begin the process of establishing national policies based on the values of Metro America? In answering this *The Great Divide* is like one of those instruction manuals that leaves you scratching your head wondering if you're missing a few pages. Step one is to elect a Democrat Congress and step two is to elect a Democratic President. “Once in control of the House of Representatives, the Presidency, and we hope, the Senate . . .”

- We must appoint judges who will respect the separation of church and state and the right of women's choice.
- Create a fair tax system.
- End corporate welfare, especially in agriculture.
- Preserve and improve Social Security.
- Create a system of universal health care.
- Adopt trade policies that benefit US families and workers worldwide.
- Rationalize defense spending.
- Invest in a sustainable energy future.
- Invest in the future through education and research and development (pp. 238–242).

And so on. *The Great Divide* is strong in documenting a major division in American society on cultural and economic issues and in arguing that there is a strong geographic connection. However, the authors fail to provide a clear and detailed strategy for electing progressive Democrats to Congress and to the presidency. The book needs a discussion of who will exert the necessary pressure on the Democratic Party to ensure that

it moves in a positive direction rather than continue its endless chase to an imagined middle ground. *The Great Divide* does not raise the question of how such pressure could be generated.

Thomas Frank's book, *What's the Matter with Kansas?* lacks the color and glitz of *The Great Divide* but it covers much of the same territory. Frank focuses on his home state of Kansas in order to explore one of the central questions of American politics: How do so many people keep getting their fundamental interests wrong? They keep voting for politicians who are dismantling the welfare state, cutting taxes on corporations and the wealthy, eliminating regulations that hold corporations accountable to the public interest, and accelerating the pace of deindustrialization and capital flight. Meanwhile, conservatives never deliver on the issues that won the support of these middle-American voters. "Abortion is never halted. Affirmative action is never abolished. The culture industry never cleans up its act" (p. 6).

Frank argues that since the "protests and partying" of the 1960s, conservatives have been whipping up a backlash that mobilizes voters by exploiting explosive social issues. The cultural anger is then wedded to pro-business economic policies. And it is the economic achievements that are the conservative movement's "greatest monuments."

Kansas, like the rest of the Great Plains, has a progressive past. It gave the country Eugene Debs and Walter Reuther, and helped spawn the IWW, the UAW, and the Farmer-Labor Party. Social Security, according to Frank, was "largely a product of the Midwestern mind" (p. 15). And Kansas was strongly abolitionist in the time leading up to the Civil War.

The "Great Backlash," however, took hold in Kansas by the 1990s. Frank says the push that started Kansas "hurtling down the crevasse of reaction was provided by Operation Rescue . . ." (p. 91). During the "Summer of Mercy" in July, 1991, Operation Rescue (a national anti-abortion organization founded in 1986 by Randall Terry) planned civil disobedience all across Wichita. The city's abortion clinics reacted to these plans by closing down for a week when the protests began. In response, Operation Rescue claimed to have stopped the abortion "industry" in its tracks. Thousands of anti-abortion activists descended on Wichita participating in various acts of civil disobedience and a massive rally in the football stadium at Wichita State University.

The anti-choice activity distracted attention from the nefarious forces undermining working families and small farmers in Kansas and elsewhere. In 1996, the misleadingly titled "Freedom to Farm Act" was adopted. The act effectively terminated certain price supports, opened all acreage to cultivation, and generally brought a close to the New Deal

system of agriculture regulation (non-recourse loans were ended with major ramifications for the food industry and the waistlines of Americans) (Pollin 2003). It also pushed the nation's remaining farmers into an over-production spiral causing prices for corn, wheat, and other crops to fall. The principal author of the bill was Kansas Senator Pat Roberts.

The drop in prices led to federal government subsidies based on production, which, in turn, resulted in large farms receiving the biggest handouts. "In Kansas in 2000 and 2001, such federal handouts were actually greater than what farmers earned from farming itself" (p. 65). The Freedom to Farm Act and lower crop prices were a boon for big food processing companies such as Archer Daniels Midland, ConAgra, and Cargill.

Convincing people that it is in their interest to support politicians who promote economic insecurity for American workers is no easy task. This difficult undertaking can only be accomplished by a powerful media apparatus. One of the strong points of *What's the Matter with Kansas?* is Franks' discussion of the right's ideological infrastructure.

The conservative propaganda mills (a.k.a. think tanks) are intricately tied to big business, including some of Kansas's home-grown corporate giants. Koch industries, for example, is based in Wichita. It was founded by Fred Koch, a charter member of the John Birch Society. His billionaire son Charles founded the Cato Institute in 1977. Another son, David, ran for vice president as a Libertarian. Koch money props up the Manhattan Institute, the Heartland Institute, and Citizens for a Sound Economy. Koch money also supported George W. Bush's campaigns, as well as those of conservative Kansas Senator Sam Brownback. In addition, Koch gives money to the Democratic Leadership council.

Conservatives pretend to be working class, or part of "middle America," but they consistently put forth economic policies that erode the well-being of workers. They want Americans to believe that liberalism is all powerful because it gets conservative lawmakers off the hook. (At the time of this writing, the approval rating of a very conservative Congress is an abysmal 33 percent.) (Real Clear Politics 2005). According to Frank, the Great Backlash is a combination of traditional Republican politicians and working class Janes and Joes, who signed on to preserve family values. Although the cultural backlash has been building since the 1960s, Frank says it has "pretty much been a complete bust . . . traditional gender roles continue to crumble. Homosexuality is more visible and more accepted than ever" (p. 121). The conservatives harp on cultural issues but almost never achieve results *on these issues*. What they are really after is cultural turmoil. It helps solidify their base by creating an enemy that can be targeted – the latte-sipping, Volvo-driving, liberal elite – and

takes attention away from the right's economic initiatives, which are undermining working families. The conservatives deny the economic basis of social class while nurturing a cultural class war. The culture war generates a fog that disguises the class-based nature of conservative policy making.

Frank doesn't seem to have much hope for the Democratic Party. He is well aware of their corporate ties, and he notes that the Democratic Leadership Council has been pushing the party to forget blue-collar voters. They are more interested in courting corporate interests that can contribute significantly more cash than unions. As mentioned, even the right-wing Koch Industries give to the DLC.

Frank puts more effort at getting class into the center of the debate, and he is quite critical of the approach offered by *The Great Divide*. In his *New York Times* review, Frank argues that *The Great Divide* substitutes region for class and in doing so the authors neglect the important question of why low-wage workers in "Retroland" would vote for a system that only benefits their masters (Frank 2004). Most disheartening, according to Frank, is Sperling's recommendation to the Democratic Party that it present itself as the true party of business and to denounce conservatism as a superstition that undermines our international competitiveness.

And what does a progressive Democratic Party insider think of all this? Robert Reich tells us in a friendly, lucid style that has made him a widely-read author and a popular voice among those hoping to influence Democratic strategy making. Reich's ties to the party and to the political establishment are deep. He served as secretary of labor under President Clinton and he worked for the Federal Trade Commission under President Carter. He also worked for Robert Bork in the Justice Department when Gerald Ford was president.

*Reason* is a defense of the liberal political philosophy and it serves the important function of reminding readers of the goals of liberalism and its claimed accomplishments. The classical liberal ideas that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were to improve the well-being of all people, not just the rich and the privileged. And Reich is a good spokesperson for these ideals.

Reich is well aware of problems with the economic and political systems and he takes a number of progressive positions. He points out that the United States is the only advanced nation that doesn't have paid family leave and that more than a third of working parents don't even get holidays or sick leave from their employers. He notes that almost every major bank in New York helped Enron commit fraud and that corporate malfeasance is harmful to small businesses and investors. He denounces runaway executive pay as a real scandal. Reich chides the

“Radcons” for concerning themselves with private morality but not the public morality that leads to corporate wrongdoing or the corrosive influence of money in politics. Reich says most campaign contributions amount to legalized bribery and he favors a blind trust system that would bar candidates from discovering who contributed what.

For Reich, society’s progress has come as a result of the ideas developed by liberal intellectuals, and not from the labor movement or class struggle. According to Reich, liberalism “led New Dealers to regulate banking and clean up Wall Street [and] prompted them to create Social Security, unemployment insurance and a minimum wage, rather than resort to European-style socialism” (p. 6). Twice over the last century, Reich claims, liberals have saved capitalism from its own excesses.

There is much that is appealing in Reich’s book but *Reason* is clearly anti-socialist, it makes the labor movement historically invisible, and it is unequivocally pro-globalization.

*Reason* is best when it attacks its chief target, radical conservatism. Reich believes that Radcons hold their beliefs sincerely. They define the world in terms of good and evil, and there is no compromising with evil, no negotiating. It must be destroyed. Regardless of whether Radcons are cynical or sincere, Reich does a good job of poking holes in their arguments and bringing attention to the right’s ideological infrastructure. He states: “Radcons have risen by means of a highly efficient, self-reinforcing system designed to shape public opinion and politics. The system consists of a steady stream of money from corporate executives, wealthy ideologues, conservative family foundations, and Radcon media tycoons . . .” (p. 9). On the other hand, “there are almost no liberal radio or television personalities . . .” (p. 9).

Indeed, it is the right’s sustained efforts at building ideological propaganda mills and developing their capacity to influence the established media and lawmakers that provides one of the most direct answers to Thomas Frank’s question of why so many people vote against their basic interests.

Understanding the influence of the right in the mainstream media, as well as their capacity to develop their own media outlets, is crucial to understanding the broader ideological questions. Conservatives have built counter-institutions and alternative professional associations. They have set up propaganda mills that cultivate and support conservative writers, that do pseudoscientific research and send out executive summaries, press releases, and talking points to government officials, conservative talk show hosts, the media, educational institutions, and on and on. They set up pseudo-scholarly magazines. They buy radio stations. They get their distorted word out. The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy

reported in 1997 that twelve conservative foundations gave US\$ 120 million to organizations promoting right-wing causes. The comparable figure for liberal groups was significantly less at just US\$ 18.6 million.

Another element of the right's upsurge is the growth of pundits and talk-show hosts who promote the Radcon agenda. Rush Limbaugh's radio show went national in 1988. Rupert Murdoch owns Fox News, a national cable TV station commanded by Republican political strategist Roger Ailes. There is little on the left that is comparable.

Of the nationally syndicated talk shows on 691 stations in the top 120 markets, 86 percent are conservative. The top five radio station owners broadcast 310 hours of nationally syndicated right-wing talk each week and just 5 hours of non-conservative talk. The major right-wing propaganda mills and Republican political committees send their talking points by e-mail or fax to about 400 right-wing radio hosts. All of the books reviewed here make note of the forceful presence of right-wing ideological institutions, but unfortunately none of them offer clear ideas about how to counter it.

Reich points out that Radcons have been remarkably effective at scapegoating and their media infrastructure facilitates this finger pointing. But where *Reason* is most problematic is when Reich perfunctorily, and without equivocation, defends globalization in its current corporate-led form. In fact, Reich suggests that labor's critique of free trade is another form of scapegoating ("meanwhile," Reich says, "some on the left, including organized labor, want to blame free trade") (p. 123). He claims that manufacturing jobs have decreased not just in the USA but in Brazil, Japan, and China, as though the shift away from manufacturing is the totality of the problem. And he argues against promoting international labor and environmental standards because "it makes no sense for the left to demand that our trade treaties with poor nations include "labor and environmental standards," unless such standards are pegged to what poorer nations can afford. As poorer nations become wealthier, their workers' wages and their environmental standards should be expected to improve" (p. 125).

Reich says if we want to blame anything for the loss of manufacturing jobs then blame knowledge (talk about shifting attention away from class!). "Everything is coming from everywhere. And any job that's even slightly routine is disappearing from America" (p. 126). Tell that to all the American workers serving coffee, mopping floors, and taking care of the elderly. The hypermobility of finance capital is not a problem, from Reich's point of view, "it makes perfect economic sense for Americans to invest all over the world" (p. 138).

Anti-globalists be warned, Reich cries, “you’re on the wrong side of history . . . you’re not seeing all the new jobs” (p. 128). If this is what progressive Democrats have to offer, why would the working class throw its support behind the Democratic Party?

And, although Reich believes the Democrats are too dependent on corporate contributions and that such contributions amount to legal form of bribery, he does not hesitate to declare “I always believed it possible to reform the nation by working within the political system – and still do” (p. 12). As long as that system doesn’t restrict capital mobility or redistribute the wealth, “we can’t bridge the widening gap just by transferring wealth from the have-mores to the have-lesses. Direct redistributions are politically treacherous” (p. 132). On the other hand, Reich goes on to talk about how unfair the recent tax cuts are.

*Reason* has much in common with *The Great Divide*. They both offer a liberal perspective that presents liberalism as a forward-looking set of ideas that are detached from social class. What Reich and Sperling et al., offer is an enlightened corporate viewpoint that recognizes that lowering the cost of labor to third-world levels is not the only way to attract investment and revive economically vulnerable regions of the United States. The authors recognize the economic and social importance of an educated public and an efficient infrastructure. And they recognize that government has the capacity to play a constructive role in developing both the social and the physical infrastructure. The authors are also aware that high levels of inequality represent a threat to democracy. They believe in democracy and they understand the threat that the extremes of capitalism can present. “A society is different from an economy,” Reich says, “people aren’t just buyers and sellers in a market. They’re also citizens engaged in a joint project of improving the well-being of current and future generations” (p. 144).

But Reich and Sperling et al., downplay the power of the corporate class. They do not call for strong democratic control of the nation’s productive resources, only improved corporate accountability to stockholders. They marginalize the role of labor and, although they point out the strength of the right wing’s ideological infrastructure, they do not offer a prescription for developing a competing one. Frank’s book suffers some of the same shortcomings but he, at least, is injecting class much more forcefully into the discussion.

The arguments presented in all three books are best understood in the context of two myths that present substantial stumbling blocks to the development of a broad-based progressive movement. One is the myth that the conflict of haves and have-nots has been supplanted by a new

cultural divide. This is a myth propagated by right-wing pundits who rant about America's culture wars and it is perpetuated by pollsters who found that most voters in November 2004 were motivated by moral values. But the term "values" is a very nebulous and subjective term. These poll results were often interpreted as meaning that voters were motivated by "family values" (i.e., the kind expressed by conservative Republicans), but many people value social justice, world peace, corporate responsibility, and honesty in government. Commentators could just as well say that these people are also motivated by moral values. When analysis does not look deeply at the real issues underlying general notions of a new social divide then it does do more to obscure than to clarify.

The second myth is the need for austerity. It is the belief that the United States can no longer afford to provide substantial benefits to its working people. The need for austerity is usually justified by references to the competitive nature of the global economy.

Neither of these beliefs hold true. For decades worker pay in the United States has been increasing much more slowly than productivity. The benefits of this productivity are conveyed upward to the investor class. Consider the fact that the mean net worth of the richest 1 percent of Americans grew by nearly US\$ 5 million over the past two decades – from US\$ 7.8 million in 1983 to US\$ 12.7 million in 2001 (in 2001 dollars). By contrast, the mean net worth of middle class Americans increased by less than US\$ 15,000, and the net worth of the lowest 40 percent of Americans *decreased* by more than US\$ 2,000 (Wolff 2004). Consider also, that in 1989 the richest 1 percent of Americans owned financial assets (i.e., investment capital) that totaled US\$ 2.4 trillion. By 2001 their financial assets had grown to US\$ 6.4 trillion (Kennickell 2003).

Globally, it's the same story. The richest one percent own more assets than the lowest 90 percent combined. The 1990s, in spite of economic growth that added approximately US\$ 10 trillion per year to the global economy, left the number of people living in dire poverty basically unchanged at more than one billion (Flavin 2002).

Any existing austerity is a surplus austerity. That is to say, it is a product of social domination not economic underproduction. The policies of the both the Bush Administration and Congress are clearly promoting class interests. Federal tax "reforms" enacted since 2001 have resulted in an average tax cut of US\$ 123,592 for the nation's seven-figure income earners. There are approximately 250,000 households in the USA with incomes of over a million dollars, their tax cuts cost the rest of the country more than US\$ 30 billion in 2005 alone. Middle-income households, on the other hand, received an average tax cut of just US\$ 647 (Shapiro and Friedman 2004).

Likewise, six million workers lost eligibility for overtime pay thanks to the Bush Administration. New rules regarding overtime pay went into effect on August 23, 2004. These rules reclassified certain administrative workers, learned professionals, financial service workers, and even cooks so that they will no longer be eligible for overtime pay. The reclassification affects workers who make as little as US\$ 24,000 a year (Eisenbrey 2004).

The right wing's ideological machinery has propagated the belief that liberalism undermines America's values. But both conservatives and many liberal thinkers propagate the myth of austerity. Conservatives have gained the upper hand by building an extensive ideological infrastructure. Conservative media outlets blame liberals for a wide variety of social ills and they have sufficiently confused enough voters to get a critical mass of them believing that the policies of George W. Bush and his radical Republican supporters are not made in the interests of a privileged capitalist class but are made to counter the corrosive effect of liberal dominance and to restore the collective strength of the US economy in the context of the new global economy.

Polling data gives us an inkling to how confused many voters are. During the 2004 election, pollsters found that a majority of the people who voted for George W. Bush thought he favored the inclusion of labor and environmental standards in trade agreements, that he was for US participation in a treaty to ban land mines, that he favored US participation in a treaty that bans the testing of nuclear weapons, that he was for US participation in the International Criminal Court, and that he was for US participation in the Kyoto accords on reducing global warming. Of course, the president was (when all the qualifiers and exceptions for the United States are considered) opposed to all of these international efforts (Program on International Policy Attitudes 2004).

Did the Democrats differ on these issues? Yes, they did. Did they make it clear? Well apparently they did to their supporters. Kerry voters were much more likely to have an accurate assessment of his position. But why were Bush supporters so wrong about their candidate? Here we once again must return to the failure of the Democrats to wage ideological warfare. Would it have been so hard to make people aware of the Texas Republican Party platform described earlier in this essay? Or to expose the deceptions practiced by the Republican right? The problem is only partially that the Democrats don't have the ideological machinery. The bigger problem may be that they are too similar to the Republicans when it comes to some core beliefs, especially their deference to the rule of capital.

This also explains why the Reich and Sperling books almost totally neglect labor as a force for progressive change. While leftists often harshly

criticize the part played by organized labor in shoring up the power of capitalism in the United States, they usually hold out some hope that labor can be a progressive force, as it was in the past. Gaspin and Yates (2005), in their recent discussion of the state of labor, say unequivocally that “governments and global lending agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund” implemented “policies that made workers increasingly insecure,” but they see numerous signs that sectors of organized labor are making common cause with the antiglobalization movement and that there are some trends toward “social justice unionism” (Gaspin and Yates 2005:3). Likewise, Dan Clawson’s *The Next Upsurge* provides evidence that the labor movement may be on the verge of a major upsurge.<sup>3</sup>

Yes, Democrats can do a better job of framing the issues (Lakoff 2004) and, more generally, progressives are hindered by the lack of an ideological infrastructure (a point made well by Robert Parry in a June, 2005, article titled “The Left’s Media Miscalculation”). But perhaps the biggest obstacle to a truly progressive response to the surging strength of radical conservatism is the Democratic Party’s unwillingness to take the lead on class issues. To even expect them to do so without pressure from progressive forces is naive. The Democratic Party will only attempt to lead the counteroffensive if it is forced, as has been the case in the past. The impetus for such a movement may include progressive elements of the Democratic Party but it is more likely to come from labor, progressive think tanks, and grassroots social-justice organizations. The development of such a progressive counterattack will involve building multiple counter-hegemonic frameworks, including a new ideological infrastructure and a progressive labor movement that connects to other movements for equity and social justice.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Critical Sociology*, vol. 31 no. 3, 2005, for a further discussion of Clawson’s work.

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