



Lessons From an Almost Successful Run in a Local Election

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Returning to my home one evening last summer I arrived to find the Chair of the local Democratic Party and another concerned resident of our township in my driveway. We engaged in long conversation about the lack of open government on the local Board of Commissioners, the need for the preservation of open space, and excessive commercial development in our community. Finally, the two men explained the reason for their visit. They said that they were looking for a Democrat to run against a controversial appointment to the Board of Commissioners (a Republican who was supported by the entrenched majority on the Board, and with whom she shared membership in a local Republican PAC). After considering the pros and cons for a few weeks (the main detractor being tenure review for Associate Professor next year), I decided to run for the position. If I won alongside another Republican running in one of the other seven wards, the result would be a local historic change on the Board. At the end of the day, when voting counts, four members (versus three) would hold the new majority, a majority that would value open government, low density development, and preservation of public space, regardless of party affiliation. If I won, I would also be the only Democrat on the Board (the last one holding a position from my ward was over twenty years ago). The choice to run for public office yielded several important lessons. Below I briefly recount four of them, giving some intimate details about township politics, but ones that I think provoke more general thought about politics in general.

Lesson One: Republican in Almost Any Case. I was initially confused about why two Republican Board members (and one Republican candidate) with whom I shared nearly identical philosophy, did not simply register as Democrats. However, as I campaigned door-to-door, knocking at nearly two thousand homes over the late summer and early fall, I discovered that many community residents confessed in private that they were “really Democrats” or “Democrats at heart,” but register as Republicans because they “never know what will happen if you need to go to Board for something.” Moreover, in going door-to-door I was promised numerous votes by residents, but they were some times reluctant to put up yard signs for fear of repercussions. Fifty in the end agreed, but often expressed ambivalently to me that they might have to live with the consequences in a township where there is one hundred percent local Republican leadership.

Other factors more fully explain this pattern of *Republican in almost any case*. One of them is that the majority of

the township votes Republican (voting by party, not by person). In some wards, it is virtually impossible to get elected if you do not run as a Republican. Another factor is economic. While the local Republican party and an affiliated Republican PAC wields thousands of dollars for local elections (and one of the Board members challenged in the election—a real estate millionaire—contributed thousand of dollars to his own campaign, having a total expenditure of approximately 13,000 dollars), the local Democrats were able to lend financial support to my campaign of about 200 dollars. That was a generous gesture since they had less than 500 dollars total. This disparity in financial resources translates into more Republican resources for paid campaign workers, signs, Xeroxing, postage, hosting events, etc. Finally, there seems to be a survival factor at work as well. While the Board members who, in my view, share the same general philosophy as Democrats, they remain estranged and dissenting members in their local Republican party. At very least, they win the elections. Differing from what they might understand as my ethnocentric Democrat view, their philosophy seems to be that they need to reclaim the local Republican party from what many disgruntled community residents call “the dark side.”

Lesson Two: Just Because They Don't Show Up Doesn't Mean Their Interests Should Not Be Served. The point of view expressed by one of the Republican Board members challenged in the last election, when I was emphasizing the need for televised meetings, is that if people were interested in local issues they would attend the regular Monday night meetings. At many meetings there are the same small groups of well-known residents and activists. In fact, when someone attends who is not part of the usual groups, it is predictable for members of the audience and the commissioners to inquire directly or indirectly who the person is, and why they are there.

Opposing the majority Board view that televised meetings are not something people want or need, that they are too expensive, and that residents might trip over electrical cords, the argument for televised meetings is that they would accommodate busy everyday schedules; and in doing so, would provide the public with detailed information on township business and give regular public exposure and visual record of the proceedings on the Board. Such proceedings have included rolling eyes at constituents, staring off into space when they are speaking, gaveling them when they speak up or out, making quick decisions on important issues that were apparently discussed in advance—if so, in violation

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of Sunshine laws, ignoring majority input with votes that are diametrically opposed to expressed community opinion, and admitting publicly of ethical (and legal) violations, such as a recent blatant admission of gerrymandering (as in the recent vote to reapportion the township, and in the process, wipe out 5 Republican rivals who are not members of the “dark side.”). Such meetings are nothing less than an exercise in self-control.

In going door-to-door, was in large part an education campaign. Many people had no idea that things were so bad, as least on a regular basis. However, many knew of the televised scandal that involved the revelation that the Commissioner (real estate agent), who was the listed agent on some real estate scoped out in the Township’s development plan, would personally profit thousands from the deal. When an ethics inquiry was in process as a result of outrage by informed opposition, it was given personal legal assistance from the Township Solicitor. Others had long ago given up on the process, stating repeatedly with resignation, “things will never change” or “they’re just going to do whatever they want anyway.”

The fact that so few people show up on a regular basis at meetings may be an indication less of their level of interest than of their immediate priorities: doing homework with children, packing lunches, attending to other family and social obligations, etc. In any case, when opposing views are expressed, those voices are often ignored or subverted, thus giving further reinforcement to the cynical attitude that nothing will change anyway. What I, among many other dissenting voices, have expressed is that community voices need to be served regardless of community attendance at meetings or organized resistance. At very least, with the continued publicizing of dissenting voices via the local newspapers (letters to the editor and coverage of township meeting proceedings), voters may at least vote for change at the polls.

Lesson Three: Interlocks. During the fall, while teaching William Domhoff’s book, *Who Rules America?*, I attended a meeting where the real estate agent Commissioner was self-describing his role on the Board as that akin to being on a Board of Directors. After he finished speaking, I raised my hand and commented that his description was an apropos one, and that it suggested certain problematics. I explained that members of Boards frequently do not simply serve on a single Board but on many of them at the same time. As a result, certain agendas can be advanced indirectly and from multiple directions; and this dynamic raises issues of conflict of interest. I gave him an example, and asked him to think of “Board of Directors” (BOD) as a loosely applied concept. I explained that he was on a BOD as member of the Board of Commissioners, as well as director as a very successful local real estate agent. One of the “agenda” items that could be advanced from multiple directions is the high-density commercial development of our township, an agenda item that he has supported in those two roles. I also mentioned that at

a recent meeting of an advisory committee to the Board of Commissioners (that advises on the implementation of development), I noticed that he was a member of that “Board” too. When I challenged him on this, he said unabashedly that he, as well as another pro-development Commissioner, were appointed to that committee by the Board of Commissioners. I stated back the obvious, “you are the Board of Commissioners!” He then said that they were only two of the committee (or “Board”) of 14. I retorted finally, something to the effect, “It doesn’t take a social psychologist to figure out that your influence is greater than your number.”

The advisory committee had the present task of hiring a Director of Development, a person who would oversee the complete restructuring of the Township’s downtown core. During the summer there was majority opposition on the Board to requiring the hired Director to have a Bachelor’s degree. Somewhat bewildered by this emphatic stance, I read the requirements for the position at a later advisory committee meeting, as specified in the multi-thousand tax dollar development plan. The Director, as indicated by the description, was someone who would have experience in urban development, grant writing, political lobbying, traffic engineering, etc.—and a professional outsider that could negotiate between conflicting parties. The next meeting of the advisory committee where applicants were to be interviewed publicly was canceled with no notice or explanation. It was weeks later that I found out through “the grapevine” that the committee hired a local boutique owner who served previously as head of the Chamber of Commerce and who, not so surprisingly, did not have a Bachelor’s degree, and serves on a Board of Directors with another member of the Board of Commissioners on a local for-profit, low income real estate interest. While the real estate Commissioner lost the last election by a slim margin (to his non-“dark side” Republican rival), he was promoted to a county-wide advisory Board by a County Commissioner (who is also a highly successful mortgage broker). The Board he was appointed to advises broad-based development for the county at large.

Lesson Four: Try, Try Again. I lost the November 4th election for Commissioner by 89 votes. As a registered Democrat and one new to local politics, I remain encouraged. Next time around, two years from now, I will be in a better position. I will have more time, be more well-versed on the dynamics of running a campaign, be a more familiar candidate with a familiar message among constituents, and will use regular postage for campaign mailings (800 pieces of bulk mail for Dems in my ward, with a photo endorsement from a local Democrat Congressman, were lost at the post office until the day of the election).☪

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The Crisis of Global Capitalism (Continued from page 1)

the 21st century is still predominantly organized as *national* capitals in competition with one another.

The current conjuncture points to the crisis of global capitalism. This crisis involves three interrelated dimensions. First, is a *crisis of social polarization*. The system cannot meet the needs of a majority of humanity, or even assure minimal social reproduction. Second is a *structural crisis of overaccumulation*. The system cannot expand because the marginalization of a significant portion of humanity from direct productive participation, the downward pressure on wages and popular consumption worldwide, and the polarization of income, has reduced the ability of the world market to absorb world output. The problem of surplus absorption makes state-driven military spending and the growth of military-industrial complexes an outlet for surplus and gives the current global order a frightening built-in war drive. Third is a *crisis of legitimacy and authority*. The legitimacy of the system has increasingly been called into question by millions, perhaps even billions, of people around the world, and is facing an expanded counter-hegemonic challenge.

This multidimensional crisis has generated intense discrepancies and disarray within the globalist ruling bloc, which has begun to tear apart from the seams under the pressure of conflicts internal to it and from forces opposed to its logic. The political coherence of ruling groups always frays when faced with structural and/or legitimacy crises as different groups push distinct strategies and tactics or turn to the more immediate pursuit of sectoral interests. Faced with the increasingly dim prospects of constructing a viable transnational hegemony, in the Gramscian sense of a stable system of consensual domination, the transnational bourgeoisie has not collapsed back into the nation-state. Global elites have, instead, mustered up fragmented and at times incoherent responses involving heightened military coercion, the search for a post-Washington consensus, and acrimonious internal disputes. In the post 9/11 period the Bush regime militarized social and economic contradictions, launching a permanent war mobilization to try to stabilize the system through direct coercion. But we need to move beyond a conjunctural focus on the Bush regime to grasp the current moment and the U.S. role in it. The U.S. state is the *point of condensation* for pressures from dominant groups around the world to resolve problems of global capitalism and to secure the legitimacy of the system overall.

There are two interlinked components to the Marxist theory of imperialism: rivalry and conflict among core capitalist powers; and the exploitation by these powers of peripheral regions. Hilferding, in his classic study on imperialism, *Finance Capital*, argued that *national capitalist monopolies* turn to the state for assistance in acquiring international markets and that this state intervention inevitably leads to intense political-economic and military rivalries among nation-states. There is a struggle among core national states for control over peripheral regions in order to open these regions to capital export from the particular imperialist

country and to exclude capital from other countries. "Export capital feels most comfortable...when its own state is in complete control of the new territory, for capital exports from other countries are then excluded, it enjoys a privileged position," observed Hilferding (1910:322). Hilferding, Lenin, and others analyzing the world of the early 20th century established a Marxist analytical framework of rival national capitals that was carried by subsequent political economists into the latter 20th century via theories of dependency and the world system, radical international relations theory, studies of U.S. intervention, and so on. This outdated framework continues to inform observers of world dynamics in the early 21st century.

What about the second dimension of the theory of imperialism? In the post-WWII period Marxists shifted the main focus in the study of imperialism to the mechanisms of core capitalist penetration and exploitation of the Third World. Imperialism, if we mean by it the relentless pressures for outward expansion of capitalism and the distinct political, military and cultural mechanisms that facilitate that expansion and the appropriation of surpluses it generates, is a structural imperative built into capitalism. It is not a policy of a particular set of state managers that run core states but a practice *immanent* to the system itself. The imperialism practiced by the Bush regime is nothing particular to a group of neo-conservative politicians and organic intellectuals in the United States and can be expected to continue, notwithstanding particular conjunctures and distinct policies and strategies among elites.

But there is nothing in this imperialism that necessarily links it to a concomitant view that capitalism by definition involves competition among *national* capitalist combines and consequent political and military rivalry among core nation-states. The current (post-9/11) moment may represent some new escalation of imperialism in response to the crisis of global capitalism. *But*, to acknowledge this "new" imperialism is *not* to suggest, as does the received literature these days, the rise of a new "U.S. empire." This literature sees a new U.S. empire competing with other nation-state capitalists. What is remarkable about the welter of recent studies that in one way or another take up the thesis of U.S. empire, national competition and core state rivalry is that none of them show how the U.S. state has acted in recent years to protect and defend *specifically U.S. capital* and to exclude or undermine other *specifically national capitals*. These studies simply *assume* the U.S. state acts to benefit "U.S." capital in competition with other core country national capitals. Yet on what basis we should conclude that the giant transnational corporations as putative beneficiaries of U.S. state action represent "U.S." capital is *not even problematized, much less documented*. That the global capital conglomerates that dominate the world economy represent distinct national capitalist groups is something that must be demonstrated, not assumed, and here the extant literature advancing the U.S. hegemony/inter-imperialist rivalry thesis appear entirely vacuous of empirical content.

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The Crisis of Global Capitalism (Continued from page 11)

What does the empirical evidence indicate? In the first place, it strongly suggests that the giant conglomerates of the *Fortune 500* ceased to be "U.S." corporations in the latter part of the 20th century and increasingly represented transnational capitalist groups (for a summary of this evidence, see Robinson, 2004). Second, the evidence indicates that U.S. policies in this period – such as the imposition of neo-liberal structural adjustment programs and the sponsorship of free trade agreements - by and large served to further pry open regions and sectors around the world to global capitalism. The U.S. state has, in the main, advanced transnational capitalist interests. The Bush regime, for instance, consistently ratified and pursued a policy not of national economic retrenchment but of neo-liberal global market integration. And an analysis of TNS institutions suggests that they act not to enforce "U.S." policies but to force nationally-oriented policies in general into transnational alignment. This is the underlying class relation between the TCC and the U.S. national state. We face an *empire of global capital* headquartered, or evident historical reasons, in Washington. There is little disagreement among global elites, regardless of their formal nationality, that U.S. power should be rigorously applied (e.g., to impose IMF programs, to bomb the former Yugoslavia, for "peacekeeping" and "humanitarian" interventions, etc.) in order to sustain and defend global capitalism. "U.S." imperialism refers to the use by transnational elites of the U.S. state apparatus to continue to attempt to expand, defend and stabilize the global capitalist system. The question for global elites (and the point of contention among them) is, in what ways, under what particular conditions, arrangements, and strategies should U.S. state power be wielded?

References

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This article is an extract from an essay that will appear in a forthcoming special issue of *Science and Society* on the "deep structure of the present moment." The journal will accept submissions until June 2004. Inquiries may go to rbriden1@juno.com or to dlaibman@jjay.cuny.edu.

William I. Robinson is Associate Professor of Sociology, Global Studies, and Latin American Studies at the University of California-Santa Barbara. His two most recent books are *Transnational Conflicts: Central America, Social Change and Globalization* (Verso, 2003), and *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

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Obituary
 T.R. Young
 Editor, *From the Left*
 1995-1998

Longtime friend, member of the Marxist section, and editor of *From the Left*, TR Young, died on February 15, 2004 in Rochester Minnesota, after suffering a long illness.

Young was born in Flint, Michigan, married Dorothy Jean Grace, a childhood friend and has five children from that marriage. Dorothy died in accident in 1981.

Young received an MA from the University of Michigan and his PhD from the University of Colorado at Boulder. Young taught social theory, social problems and social psychology at several colleges and universities around the country including Iowa Wesleyan, Rocky Mountain College in Montana, Southwest Missouri State, Colorado State

University, the University of Colorado at Boulder and the University of Michigan at Flint. He held the post of Distinguished Visiting Professor at Texas Women's University in 1991. In 1992-93, he served as Distinguished Visiting Professor at Virginia Tech.

T. R. Young was founder and director of the Red Feather Institute for Advanced Studies in Sociology [1971] and editor of the Transforming Sociology Series. The Red Feather Institute was born out of the radical politics of the 1960's. T. R. Young became its first and only Director as well as the President of the corporation which holds title to its publications. The first headquarters and first conference of the Institute were at a lakeside cottage in a small resort village, Red Feather Village, 40 miles northwest of Ft. Collins. T.R. Young and others later built a Lodge and living facilities in the Rocky Mountains between 1973 and 1977. The Institute was moved to Michigan in 1988 after Young left Colorado State University.

During the 60s, 70s and 80s, Young was a faculty resource person for student power movements, antiwar activities as well as Civil Rights and the women's movement on campus. Young founded the Martin Luther King Fellowship Fund at Colorado State University the day after King's



assassination. Young taught at Makerere University in Uganda in 1971-72 during the difficult days of Idi Amin and was part of an underground network of scholars which smuggled letters and documents to the US media and to members of Congress concerning human rights violations there. Young was appointed an Honorary Research Fellow at Exeter University in 1980 where he visited the major centers of cultural studies there. In 1985, Young participated in the Semester of Sea Program of the University of Pittsburgh, accompanying 350 students around the world to study social problems and stratification of politics, capital and social honor in Pacific Rim countries, Malay-

sia, India, Turkey, USSR, Yugoslavia and Spain. Young has visited Cuba, Nicaragua and Mexico several times to learn about social problems and social programs there. In 1987, Young was awarded the Distinguished Scholar Award of the Pacific Sociological Society for his work in the political economy and social psychology of sport.

Among his many publications are *The Drama of Social Life: Essays in Post Modern Social Psychology* (Transaction Publishers 1990), *The Dictionary of Critical Social Sciences* with Bruce, A Arrigo (Westview Press 1999) and *New Sources of Self* (Pergamon Press 1972).

TR, we will miss you.

For more information on TR Young's life and work see

<http://www.tryoung.com>
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Cleaner- Air Vehicles

Rand Knox



Tell your auto makers to stop stalling and make cleaner-air vehicles, now.

Hydrogen fuel-cell technology for automobiles is decades away, if it can ever be developed efficiently and deployed. However, there are three mechanical technologies which would double or more the efficiency of cars, light trucks, and SUVs, saving automobilists three times as much in fuel costs than what these technologies would cost to install in new vehicles.

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<http://www.bluewaternet.org>

Don't Be Fueled
<http://www.dontbefueled.org>

Natural Resources Defense Council
<http://www.nrdc.org/breakthechair>

Sierra Club
<http://www.sierraclub.org/>

Union of Concerned Scientists
<http://www.ucsusa.org>

Clean Air Progress
<http://www.cleanairprogress.org>

American Lung Association
<http://www.lungusa.org>

Tell Auto Makers to Clean Up Our Air
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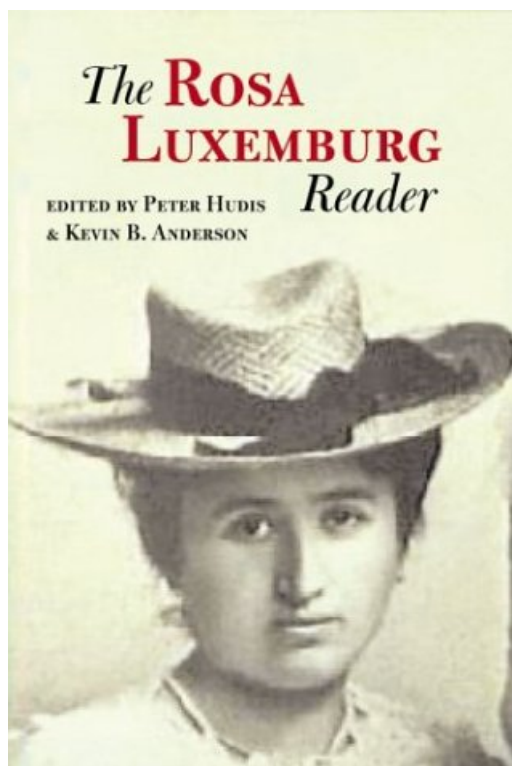
Carles Muntaner PhD, MD is a Professor in the Department of Family and Community Health and Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at the University of Maryland-Baltimore

People

Jeffrey A. Halley, University of Texas at San Antonio, was Guest Professor at the University of Metz, France, in December 2003.



Book Announcements



“Rosa Luxemburg travels into the twenty-first century like a great messenger bird, spanning continents, scanning history, to remind us that our present is not new but a continuation of a long human conflict changing only in intensity and scope. Her fiery critical intellect and ardent spirit are as vital for this time as in her own. With meticulous care, including valuable endnotes, editors Hudis and Andersen project her in the fullness of her being and thought.” — Adrienne Rich

Among the major Marxist thinkers of the period of the Russian Revolution, Rosa Luxemburg stands out as one who speaks to our own time. Her legacy grows in relevance as the global character of the capitalist market becomes more apparent and the critique of bureaucratic power more widely accepted within the movement for human liberation.

PETER HUDIS is an organizer for the Chicago-based *News & Letters* collective, and co-editor of *The Power of Negativity*, a collection of Raya Dunayevskaya's writings on dialectic.

KEVIN B. ANDERSON teaches political science at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. He is the author of *Lenin, Hegel and Western Marxism*, and the co-editor of a volume of the ongoing *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA).

Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict

*Class, State, and Nation
in the Age of
Globalization*

Berch Berberoglu

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS

Available: June 2004

This book examines the origins and development of nationalism and national movements in the twentieth century and provides an analysis of the nature and dynamics of nationalism and ethnic conflict in a variety of national settings. Examining the intricate relationship between class, state, and nation, the book attempts to develop a critical approach to the study of nationalism and ethnonational conflict within the broader context of class relations and class struggles in the age of globalization.

Berberoglu contends that future studies of nationalism and ethnonational conflict must pay a closer attention to the dynamics of class forces that are behind the ideology of nationalism by examining national movements in class terms. For only through a careful class analysis of these forces and their ideological edicts, Berberoglu contends, will we be able to clearly understand the nature of nationalism and ethnonational conflicts around the world.

Berch Berberoglu is Foundation Professor of Sociology and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Sociology at the University of Nevada, Reno.