



Inside:

- Notes from cPCP Postdoctoral fellow Jennifer Ridgley, p.2
- Neoliberal Urbanism in Poland, by Kacper Poblocki, p.3
- Crisis of Labor, Crisis of Capital, by Beverly Silver, p.5
- The Paradox of Sustainability, by Ashley Dawson and Melissa Checker, p.5
- Events Listing, p.2

<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/pcp/index.html>

Letter from the Director

Welcome, to this our first newsletter!

The tenth anniversary conference of the Center for Place, Culture and Politics that took place last May, led several of us to think that a periodic newsletter from the Center might be a good idea. In addition to informing everyone about the on-going work of the Center, it would also provide a way for past members of the seminar and friends of the Center to keep in touch with each other and

in some instances re-establish connections. We also intend to create a bulletin board upon which past and present participants can post recent work (of the sort that Kacper Poblocki, a visiting fellow from Poland, has recently sent to us for dissemination in this issue) or propose new ideas of interest to all. In this way we hope to facilitate communication and foment and diffuse new ideas. We live in a world, after all, in which networks are held to

be very important vehicles for social change. The intent is to consolidate our own progressive network and thereby encourage collective ways to contribute to progressive educational and social change.

So we invite past members of the seminar along with all those who have long been associated with the Center, to communicate with us, not only about how and what they are doing, but as to what pertinent ideas they might have for future work and political interventions. Short papers would be welcome as will news of forthcoming publications, reviews of literature and revolutionary manifestos!

As some of you will know, we have in recent years also been involved, along with Peter Marcuse, in supporting the activities of the Right to the City Alliance both here in New York and to some degree nationally. It now transpires that the idea of the right to the city has become widespread, even to the point where it was co-opted as a centerpiece for the UN sponsored World Urban Forum that took place in Rio last March. There is evidently a struggle unfolding to keep a radical edge to this movement. So we also hope to use this newsletter as a means for

The Center at Ten

When Place, Culture and Politics was established at the beginning of 2000, our ambition was to create an interdisciplinary Center that would provide an intellectual crossroads for doctoral students and faculty from across CUNY. We were inspired by a sense that some of the most pressing issues of the day lay at the intersection of questions of place, culture and politics. We sought to create a forum where intellectual inquiry and debate would mix with more activist political engagement. In the beginning, there were three facets to our work. First we would hold a weekly seminar organized around an annual theme in which Center fellows would have a chance to present their work and to participate in discussions of work of other fellows' work. Second, we would establish a Distinguished Lecturer Series, inviting a roster of international figures to address the year's theme in a public lecture and to join the seminar for a more intense discussion. Third, we would hold conferences related to the year's theme as well as other events such as debates, lectures, panels, film showings, book launches. With the enthusiastic support of Bill Kelly, then-Provost now GC President, the Center was initially (and still is) supported by CUNY Graduate Center funds, but a Ford Foundation grant on the Remaking of Area Studies allowed us to expand and extend our activities significantly.

Continued on p.4

Continued on p.2

Notes from CPCP Postdoctoral Fellow Jennifer Ridgley

CPCP / RTTC Bulletin Board

In future issues of our bimonthly newsletter, this space will be used to build informal solidarities, e.g. you'll be in Trieste and are looking for a nice sofa to sleep on, you're giving away your cat, you've opened a vegan catering business to support your dissertation research and want customers..... Feel free to send relevant posts to pcp@gc.cuny.edu. Submissions will be edited for content.

After some rather bizarre encounters with the U.S. immigration system, I arrived at the Center at the end of August to take up a Postdoctoral Fellowship. Because much of my recent organizing work has focused on the labor struggles of public sector workers in Canada, and the growing immigrants' rights movement in North America, this year's theme at the Center, Labor/Crisis/Protest, is one that is very close to my heart.

Last year, I completed my PhD in Geography at the University of Toronto, where my work focused on city

sanctuary policies in the United States and local government involvement, or resistance to, the enforcement of federal immigration law. This project highlighted the significance of the city as a site for the bordering practices of state institutions, and critically engaged with contemporary scholarship on the state of exception.

My current research project traces the convergence between the management of migrant labor and the criminal justice system in the United States. This year, I will be focusing my research on the restructuring of the

U.S. Immigration Service during the late 1930s and early 1940s. This restructuring, which occurred in the context of the significant labor unrest and security concerns that preceded U.S. involvement in the Second World War, led to profound changes in the way migration was perceived and managed in the United States. I am particularly interested in the shift to new technologies of governance that allegedly targeted criminal and subversive elements in the non-citizen population, including the registration and fingerprinting of resident aliens (through the 1940 Alien Registration Act), and new uses of detention and deportation, all of which were facilitated and legitimized by a growing legal and institutional convergence between migration policy and crime controls. *Jennifer Ridgley*

Letter from the Director

Continued from p.1

networking internationally with radical groups anxious to avoid "cooptation by NGO."

Please feel free to communicate with us as the spirit moves you. The Center has had a great record

of promoting both solidarities and good fellowship across disciplines and cultures. We hope this newsletter will help all of you keep in touch while keeping that spirit alive and productive.

David Harvey

Get to know all the CPCP fellows.... Visit: <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/pcp/people.html>

September 22, 2010: CPCP Fall Party , 5.30 - 7.30 PM in Room 6107

September 27, 2010: THE ENIGMA OF CAPITAL, by David Harvey, 7 PM in the Proshansky Auditorium. Book launch and panel discussion with author David Harvey. Discussants: Leo Panitch, Frances Fox Piven, William Tabb, and Melissa Wright.

September 29, 2010: The Politics Of Scale And Struggles For Urban Democracy In Poland, a talk by Kacper Poblocki. 6.30 PM in Room 6107.

October 19, 2010: Crisis of Labor, Crisis of Capital: A Global View from the End of the "American Century". A talk by Professor Beverly Silver, 6.30 PM in the Skylight Room (9th floor).

October 25, 2010: In conversation: Raquel Rolnick, UN Special Rapporteur on Housing, David Harvey, and Peter Marcuse (Professor Emeritus, Columbia University). The Recital Hall, 12:00 pm - 2 pm.

October 27, 2010: A public talk by Bill Fletcher, title TBA. 6.30 PM in the Skylight Room (9th floor).

UPCOMING EVENTS
For details and updates visit
<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/pcp/events.html>

Poland: the worm has turned on neoliberal urbanism

By Kacper Poblocki

The Polish finance minister boasted in the *Wall Street Journal* (31.01.2010) that the “secret” of Poland’s economic “success” (it was the only country in Europe to record economic growth in 2009) lays in its economic policy “based on a profound belief in free market economics”. Poland, Mr. Rostowski argued, is now ready to teach the nuts and bolts of neoliberalism back to the Anglosaxon world. What he failed to mention is that although goods are still being bought and sold in Poland, many clients stopped paying for them. Had growth statistics included the factor of financial liquidity, then Poland would not have been the only “green island” of growth in Europe. Leaving statistics aside, a short evening walk in Polish cities is sufficient to observe that the crisis is just round the corner. Very few widows of the newly completed apartments are lit and many investments have been halted. On top of that, the recent months have witnessed an unprecedented grassroots mobilization around the right to the city (RTTC) agenda, and this may soon bring about profound political consequences.

Perhaps the most visible portent of the changes to come are the five referenda on impeaching city mayors that have been independently organized and held in Poland since the Fall of 2009. In each case there was a different “trigger” that mobilized grassroots ire and initiative. They ranged from sexual harassment (Olsztyn), corruption allegations (Sopot), a decision to replace

tramway transport with buses (Gliwice), too close co-operation with the Catholic Church (Częstochowa, an important pilgrimage site), and general ill-management of the city (Łódź). Three of the five referenda were successful. At the same time, local RTTC groups mushroomed in Polish cities, and at this point there are over twenty of them. Except for local activism, some nation-wide campaigns have been initiated, and in the city of Poznań such an organization (*M-Poznaniacy*) is currently organizing a city-wide coalition that is very likely to run in the municipal elections slated for the Fall.

Why such a flurry of RTTC activism in the recent months? It is the harvest of the last six years of neoliberal urban expansion. If we only look at the urban tissue, then most of Poland’s built environment had been largely formed during a massive construction boom between 1966 and 1976. In the “lost decades” to follow, Polish cities were increasingly neglected and underinvested. The privatization of public assets during the 1990s has been mainly focused on the selling off of the former industrial capacities, and it was only Poland’s accession to the European Union (2004) that fully opened its cities up to foreign developers and transformations. Just as the 1970s building boom brought about a powerful and globally renown social movement called *Solidarność* (numbering 10 million members), that had a very 1968-like agenda of increased grassroots participation in the running of

workplace and cities, what we can observe today is an equivalent spontaneous reaction to the violent disruption of the urban life resulting from aggressive policies pursued by developers, usually in tacit cahoots with municipal authorities.

The green urban frontier

How did the post-2004 developments lead to RTTC mobilization? As the developers-municipality nexus has been exclusively interested in construction projects with the lowest outlays and the highest profits, and since property development is often one of the largest costs incurred during construction, developers sought to build on areas where basic infrastructure was already in place. In most cases, these were green areas in between already existing buildings. This, of course, led to overbuilding, a sharp increase in population density, and a corresponding decrease in the quality of life for residents (higher traffic congestion, less recreational space, noise pollution, and so forth). Since the spatial order of Polish cities has been blueprinted during the socialist urban expansion, but very few of the planned public amenities were actually built (such as swimming pools, recreational spaces, or cultural facilities), green areas remain virtually the only remaining public spaces available to residents free of charge. Thus the struggle of urban movements in Poland, and especially in Poznań, has been directed mainly at defending small parks – that, in the rhetoric of

the administration, represented “thickets” or “delected areas” to be developed.

While in many countries the RTTC struggles have coalesced around the issues of illegality, in Poland, because the authorities are notorious for breaching existing laws and regulations, defending the relatively rich traditions of spatial planning and regulations has become the major weapon of urban movements. The Poznań RTTC group was initiated already in 2004 with a (successful) campaign against the plan to build a golf course, and expand the industrial territory of a Volkswagen factory. This informal coalition was registered in 2008, and only this year it scored two major victories – one in defending an inner-city green areas from being turned into a luxury villa district and second in pressing the City Council to pass a local development plan that designates for a public park a post-industrial site in a large pre-fab dormitory district, and dashes the plans of a powerful developer to build there more of the residential towers with no additional infrastructure. The two campaigns were lead on a turf that was quite different socially, but one of the major strengths of that movement is precisely the ability to transcend class differences in a city-wide campaign. What is particularly helpful in forging such alliances is a redefined notion of the city as a public and a common good, and the intensive (and sympathetic) media coverage of both campaigns helped to

Poland: the worm has turned on neoliberal urbanism

Continued from p.3

communicate that new message to the larger swathes of Poznań's residents.

National RTTC campaigns

The legal tools of urban struggles had to be also defended at the national scale. In 2009 the very first nation-wide campaign, led by activists from Warsaw's Włochy district, managed to halt a legislative attempt to completely de-regulate the urban order. In 2009 the Polish Parliament approved a piece of legislation prepared by the so-called Friendly State Commission (a wonderful misnomer). The new law abrogated the former requirement of obtaining construction permits, and local administrations could easily avert responsibilities of maintaining any particular spatial order. Under the new law, all planning conflicts would accede to the sphere of civil litigation; hence, if, and only if, you had the capital means, you could sue. This bill was passed despite the lobbies of 17 civic organizations against it. However, activists did not give up. They demanded from the Polish President that this bill be revoked as unconstitutional, and this time they were successful. It was the very first national victory in the civic struggle against the commodification of urban space in Poland.

The process of RTTC

mobilization is still uneven in Poland. In Gdańsk, for example, a rather tempered critique of a new development (the so-called Quatro Towers) is making incremental strides forward at best. The American developer (Hines) nipped all discontents in the bud and indicted the pundit and a community organizer of slander. In Poznań, in contrast, the local power block centered on incumbent mayor is clearly beginning to crumble, and activists are even being heard at City Hall hearings although they are, according to the law, not allowed to do so. Most recently, national media have started acknowledging the unprecedented civil mobilization around urban issues, and the RTTC slogan – still in 2008 virtually unknown in Poland – has received a considerable publicity. All this suggests that the this year's municipal elections will be very different from all the previous ones – if not as candidates for City Hall like in Poznań, RTTC activists will take an important role as commentators and watchdogs of the local governments, and the cornerstones of the incipient urban democracy.

Kacper Poblocki was a CPCP fellow in 2009, and currently is an assistant professor of anthropology and urban studies at the Roosevelt Academy (Utrecht University) as well as a RTTC activist in Poznań, Poland. He will give a talk at CPCP on September 29th.

The Center @10

continued from p.1

It is always difficult to assess an effort one is close to, but I think it's fair to say that in this regard the Center has if anything exceeded our early ambition. It has attracted fellows from more than a dozen disciplines, mainly in the humanities and social sciences but also the natural sciences, with an average of six to eight disciplines represented in each year. It has brought speakers from every continent (except Antarctica), and has attracted an astonishing range of visiting postdoctoral and doctoral scholars from many countries, often with funding from their home countries, others with Fulbrights, as well as those funded through the Center itself. Various fellows and friends of the Center have returned to New York from around the world with tales of the Center's doings refracted back (sometimes with recognizable accuracy) from far flung corners of academia. Several books and numerous articles have come from the Center's activities and various events and activities have attracted media attention.

If the Center's intellectual activities have taken off, the connection with activist and political organizing work also represents an ongoing challenge. In January 2003, the Center hosted the first New York Social Forum, held at the Grad Center. We later met with members of several housing and anti-gentrification organizations from around the US, and in 2006 with Peter Marcuse of Columbia University we initiated a citywide "Right to the City" seminar and working group. This soon morphed into a multifaceted collaboration with several activist groups in the city associated with the nationwide organization, the Right to the City Alliance, which formed in 2008. Since then, the Center has hosted a number of working meetings, seminars, presentations and other sessions that have helped in some small way to use CUNY's intellectual resources for the broader community. Graduate Center students, many of them active with various of these movements, have been central to the progress of this work.

As the Center moves into its second decade, I am sure it will continue to span issues of "place, culture and politics" from the global to the local scales. It will inevitably take on new challenges even as it deals with existing ones. On a personal note, I am thrilled to have had the chance to direct the Center as it got off the ground and would like to thank everyone – fellows (approximately 150) and guest speakers, the advisory board -- for vital support. There are obviously too many to name but I would like to mention the staff at Center, especially Megan Schauer who guided us through the crucial early phase, and Padmini Biswas who has helped in recent years to navigate an increasingly active Center. I would also like to thank Pater Hitchcock, Omar Dahbour and Ida Susser who have been both imaginative and indispensable as associate directors of the Center, and of course David Harvey who willingly took the reins after my stint was over. Here is to the challenges ahead.

Neil Smith, Center Director 2000-2008

Crisis of Labor, Crisis of Capital: A Global View from the End of the “American Century”

by Beverly Silver

Beverly Silver, Professor of Sociology at the Johns Hopkins University, will meet with current CPCP fellows in their seminar on October 20th. She will also give a free, public talk in the Skylight Room of the CUNY Graduate Center on October 19th at 6.30 pm. The following is an abstract of her paper.

This paper analyzes the relationship between labor movements and capitalist crises focusing on the four crises of the “long twentieth century” (the late nineteenth century Great Depression, the 1930s Great Depression, the late 1960s and 1970s, and the present.) The overarching thesis is that there has been a pendulum swing between crises of capital that are rooted in a situation in which labor is “too strong” from the point of view of capital (1870s and 1970s) and crises rooted in a situation in which labor is “too weak” from the point of view of capital (1930s, today). The processes unleashed in resolving one type of crisis (including the making/unmaking of working classes) eventually bring about the opposite type of crisis. A first iteration conclusion is that the resolution of the current crisis requires a new swing of the pendulum in the direction of a major redistribution of income from capital to labor on a world-scale. One could

interpret the current upsurge in strike activity and labor unrest in China as an important force pushing in the direction of redistribution from capital to labor, analogous to the role of the 1930s-1940s strikes in the United States; while the current push for cutbacks in Europe would appear to be pushing in the opposite direction.

The pendulum swings described in the first section of the paper are geographically uneven processes. In order to make sense of this geographical unevenness, the second part of the paper further widens the geographical scope and lengthens the temporal horizon of the analysis. More specifically, the second section of the paper reanalyzes the pendulum swings as being intertwined with the rise, full flowering and crisis/decline of US power on a world scale and of the social-economic developmental model that was integral to the “American century”. The post-WWII labor-capital accords were rooted in a model of development that was ecologically destructive, embedded in an expansive military-industrial complex, and premised on the *de-facto* exclusion of the majority of the world’s population from participation in the US-sponsored style of mass

consumption (the “American Dream”). A return to this developmental model (and/or its further global spread) is neither feasible nor desirable, while entrenched interests and habits mean that the transition to a new (more sustainable and equitable model) is unlikely to be smooth. The paper concludes by comparing the present with past world-hegemonic transitions in order to draw some concrete conclusions about the options open to labor movements in the early twentieth-century.

CPCP ALUMNI AROUND NYC

September 24, 2010

[The Road to Energy Independence](#)

Alternative Vehicle Technology Conference with Keynote Speaker Christian Parenti, CPCP Visiting Scholar

September 28, 2010

Midnight on the Mavi Marmara: The Attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and How It Changed the Course of the Israel/Palestine Conflict

Reading & Discussion by Moustafa Bayoumi, CPCP Board Member, & others

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

THE PARADOX OF SUSTAINABILITY

Former CPCP faculty fellow Ashley Dawson, in partnership with Melissa Checker, Assistant Professor of Urban Studies at Queens College, CUNY, are chairing a public seminar on sustainability this fall. They write:

Promising environmental responsibility, social equity, and economic prosperity, “sustainability” has become a ubiquitous term for both policy-making and popular culture over the last several decades. Yet the popularity of sustainability discourse has emerged in tandem with the global dissemination of neoliberal doctrines of unrestrained free markets. Are these parallel, yet seemingly paradoxical discourses compatible? This seminar will explore sustainability as both myth and practice, investigating the specific ways that discourses and practices of sustainability map onto contemporary economics, politics, and cultures on a variety of spatial scales. In order to develop an in-depth understanding of the potential paradoxes in sustainability, we also will place the concept within an historic framework. Thus, seminar participants will question the degree to which models of sustainability are shaped by particular cultural frameworks, themselves often the product of long histories of spatially inscribed inequality. Moreover, we will address how an eco-centric emphasis on sustainability, combined with its marketization, erases and reinscribes such inequalities.

To participate in this seminar, visit:
<http://centerforthehumanitiesgc.org/seminars>