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REVIEW OF STAUGHTON LYND'S *LIVING INSIDE OUR HOPE*

"In June 1965 a very small group went to the steps of the Pentagon to picket against the war in Vietnam. Within moments of our arrival we were surrounded by military policemen incredulous that a handful of people would undertake so obviously ineffectual an action. 'You don't understand,' I replied with all the dignity I could muster, 'we are just the first of thousands.' (As it turned out, we were.)"

That's the first paragraph of Staughton Lynd's new book, and its texture, the careful, modest statement of fact slipping into the personal testimony, the calm sense of principle that scrupulously insists on the role of chance, is the best possible illustration of the book's virtues. Lynd's collection of essays is both profoundly moving and intellectually rigorous, and it provides both a concise, generously readable account of how the working people got into this fix (you know the one,) and a truly inspiring sense that we can and will get out of it.

The book is better read than described. Its twelve essays flow carefully together, even though the topics vary from contemporary problems in organizing factories to the relevance of Christian, specifically Quaker, thought to a left practice, with stops for E.P. Thompson, Rosa Luxemburg, and a cogent and radical redefinition of the idea of property rights. Always Lynd is reasonable, compassionate, "a man speaking to men." It is this voice (no better word) which holds the book together, a gift in its own right. I think Lynd's prose here is as clear and strong as Orwell's in *HOMAGE TO CATALONIA*. This insistence on transparency and simplicity may not recommend the book to academics who are used to, say, Jameson's pitiless gear-grinding or Foucault's Cheshire Cat impersonations, but even professional dialecticians should admit that the plain style has its uses. Take Bill Clinton. The only thing more appalling than his administration's utter contempt for the interests of working people must be the contortions that the liberal media (Not Gingrich's hydra-headed myth, but the puny liberal media that we actually do have: *The NATION*, *DISSENT*, etc.) performs in order to free the Fearful Leader from moral responsibility for his own policies. Remember when it was all Dick Morris's fault? Remember the closet New Dealer who would show up for the second term? Or should we focus on the issues? Speaking of which, how are you enjoying Universal Health Care? Lost in this gibberish is the possibility that the administration is **SUCCESSFULLY** carrying out its agenda. The problem is that this agenda is harmful to the vast majority of the population. Lynd puts it better:

"As a candidate, Bill Clinton ran on a program of 'jobs'. But the fundamental goal of President Clinton's administration is not to create jobs. It is to help firms based in the United States compete and make profits in the international market[.]"

There are two striking aspects to this passage. It is absolutely correct, and it can be understood by a clever ten-year old. That so many prominent liberal and left intellectuals seem not to understand it suggests... something. But beyond that, it shows how valuable this book is in its dignified adherence to first principles. Lynd is willing to name the enemy: Capitalism. For him, the story of these years of

retrenchment, falling wages, "labor-management cooperation," and "ending welfare as we know it" is not proof of socialism's irrelevance, but evidence of its necessity, and a reminder of how much of the spirit that animated the popular struggles of the 1930's (or the 1960's, if you prefer) we have let pass away. Lynd is too committed to allow himself despair, but one cannot read the work without a sense of his anguish at how much left thought and culture has deteriorated in his lifetime, at least insofar as it is directly useful to working people in their self-organization and self-assertion. For someone like me, for whom this era of diminished expectations is simply the only one I have known, Lynd's essays here on Freedom Summer, the IWW, or the early years of the Soviet Union are revelatory; not only because they demonstrate how much of this history has been obscured by propaganda (who says the Democratic and Republican parties never work together and forge a lasting consensus?) but because they are written not to explain respectively why what DID happen was what HAD TO happen, but to show the sense of possibility that was alive at these particular moments. That the story of the IWW is ultimately one of defeat is true; but it is also a story of working people discovering their own ideas and organizational forms through a practice of solidarity. The IWW may have lived in the 1930's, but Lynd makes one understand how much it foreshadowed 1968: "Be realistic-Demand the impossible."

Many things seem impossible to the left in 1999 We have grown timid, "pragmatic" in our demands. Staughton Lynd asks that we speak at the top of our lungs once again-not simply for our own spiritual hygiene, but because his lifelong study of working class history has convinced him that IT WORKS. Again and again in the book, he shows the possibilities of a unified theory and practice which is "as radical as reality." Nowhere is this more striking than in his essay on workers' reaction to the dismantling of the steel industries in Youngstown and Pittsburgh.

Lynd has worked as a labor lawyer in Youngstown for many years, and so is well placed to tell this story. Between 1977 and 1980, Youngstown's entire steel industry was shut down. As it had been the second largest steel town in the country, the effects were predictably catastrophic. The community's reaction, however, was virtually without precedent. Over the course of several years, a popular movement developed which went far beyond simply demanding jobs or welfare for the displaced workers. The people of Youngstown went further than that, further than our model of business unionism has ever gone: They articulated a series of legal challenges to the notion of private ownership and control itself. Later, displaced steelworkers in Pittsburgh would do the same thing, asking the courts to allow them to take over and operate the mills that their corporate masters had shut down. The interlocking arguments that they used can't really be summarized here, but no one who reads Lynd's account of them, and of the tenacity with which they were developed and argued, will ever doubt the potential of a working class to speak for itself and act for itself, apart from, or in opposition to the professional union bureaucrats and "liberal" intellectuals who presume to speak for them.

Were the Youngstown and Pittsburgh movements successful? Not on their own terms. But they offer a possibility for spontaneous popular organizing which could be replicated in a thousand cities, with a hundred thousand "leaders," until they could not fail. In the same way, Staughton Lynd offers not only a great volume of political writings, but an assurance that each of us can articulate our experiences, and our hope, sometimes serene, sometimes desperate, that the game is not yet over, and that sanity may yet win. A review like this can only suggest "Go get it and read it for yourself." Lynd's work is requires no justification that the last twenty-five years do not provide. What he writes of Simone Weil functions just as well as a description of his own work and, it seems fair to say, his self:

1"One comes away from encounter with Simone Weil refreshed in the belief that a small piece of good work, for instance, a single life well lived, makes a difference."

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