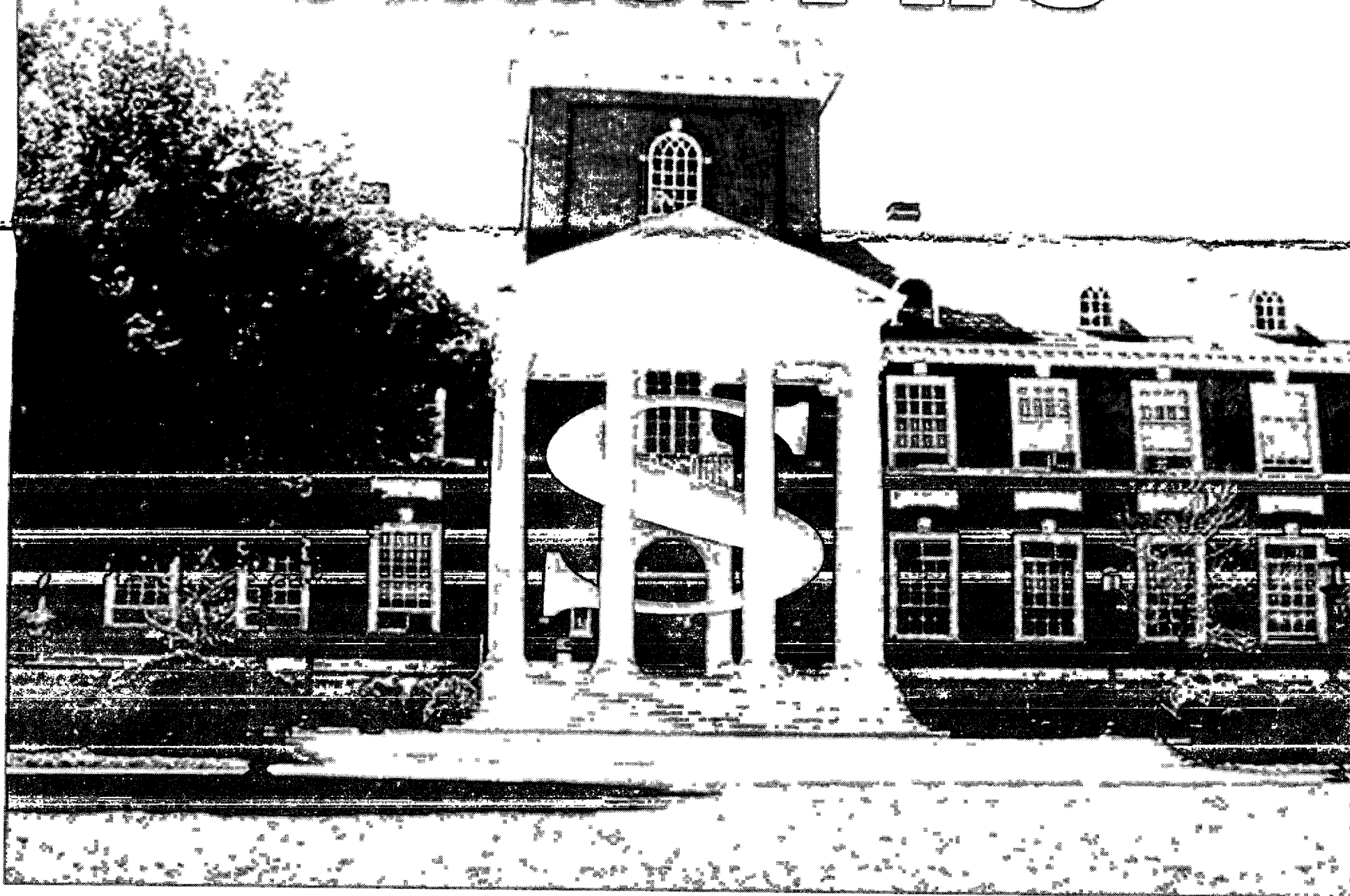


For-Profits Under Fire



ALSO INSIDE

Interview: Mustafa Bayoumi on Arab America (p 12)

ABD and on the Dole: Grad Students on Public Assistance (p 7)

Pavement in the Park: Indie Rockers Return to NYC (p. 20)

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

James Hoff

MANAGING EDITOR

Michael Busch

LAYOUT EDITOR

Mark Wilson

MEDIA BOARD CHAIR

Anick Boyd

CONTRIBUTORS

Emily Ackerman

Frank Episale

Anamaria Flores

Sarah Ruth Jacobs

Tim Krause

Matt Lau

Kim Libman

Leigh McCallen

Lavelle Porter

Peter Richards

Lily Saint

Mark Schiebe

Doug Singen

Calvin Smiley

PUBLICATION INFO

The GC Advocate is the student newspaper of the CUNY Graduate Center and is published seven times a year. Publication is subsidized by Student Activities Fees and the Doctoral Students' Council.

SUBMISSIONS

The GC Advocate accepts contributions of articles, illustrations, photos and letters to the editor. Please send queries to the email address above.

Articles selected for publication will be subjected to editorial revision. Writers who contribute articles of 1,000 words will be paid \$50 and those who submit longer articles requiring research will receive \$75. We also pay for photographs and artwork.

The GC Advocate is published six times a year, in September, October, November, February, March, and April. Submissions should be sent in by the middle of the month. Print copies will normally be on the stacks around the end of the month.

Why The Left Needs a Real Tea Party

Why the Left Needs a Real Tea Party

"Please, sir, I want some more"

—Charles Dickens

"Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have the exact measure of the injustice and wrong which will be imposed on them."

—Frederick Douglass

Earlier this summer, in what might very well turn out to be a representative moment in Barack Obama's first term as president, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs blasted what he cynically termed the "Professional Left" for their frequent and often trenchant criticisms of the Obama administration. In an interview filled with false generalizations and misdirected outrage, Gibbs claimed these critics would not be satisfied if even Democrat Dennis Kucinich were president, arguing that they would give up their relentless attacks on Obama only when the United States had eliminated the Pentagon and created a Canadian style health care system. For Gibbs apparently, these obviously quite worthy objectives are simply unrealistic and unobtainable, and consequently inappropriate measures for judging a Democratic President. The truth, however, is a little more complicated, and sadly, it is precisely Gibbs' false realism, combined with his party's recreant (many have used the word gutless) willingness to compromise, that has reduced the Democrats to a collection of petty spokespersons, demoralized strategists, and bumbling bureaucrats with little heart and no heat.

Despite this fact, however, Gibbs is not the only one criticizing the progressive Left, and just like they do every two years, the party faithful are waking from out of their workaday comas and beginning all over again to put forward the same self-defeating arguments they do each election cycle: claiming that Democrats are offering the only reasonable solutions, making bogey men out of Republican (and Tea Party) candidates, and suggesting that anyone who disagrees is a dangerous and naive day-dreamer unfit for political life. American party politics, they argue, is a zero-sum game, and when you criticize the Democrats you inevitably help the Republicans. This argument may very well be true in the short term (a prime example of the need for serious and substantial electoral reform), but real progress is not measured in electoral cycles. Substantive change and political progress is not about party politics but is fundamentally about power; and power—as Shelley, Thoreau, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King made clear—is not about who sits in the White House, but about who's sitting in the streets. Regardless of who is in office, it is those who have power, and those who can best exhibit their potential to exercise that power, who have the most influence on policy. There is no abstract notion of the better good or the great society that is somehow independent of that exhibition of power; and therefore no American government (Democrat or Republican) ever really works in the public's interest, but instead works only in the interests of those that it fears and on whom it relies. Blindly and thoughtlessly supporting the Democrats when they continue to offer middle of the road alternatives to actual change, when they continue to prostrate themselves before the towers of corporate influence, when they continue to offer compromised bills written from an already distortedly compromised position, is what really gives comfort and aid to the Republicans; for the Democrats simply have no incentive to change the terms of the debate while the Republicans have no real reason to worry about a Democratic majority.

This is because the Republicans have figured out a fundamental truism of bargaining and applied it at an ideological level: ask for more than what you actually want and you will inevitably get what you wanted! The Republicans—although some have admittedly begun to criticize the stupidity and brute ignorance of such Tea Party darlings as Christine O'Donnell and Carl Paladino—secretly love the Tea Party, for though the Tea Party may temporarily make the right

look like a bunch of insane zealots hell-bent on destroying the government, the very existence of those voices, so far to the right of most Republican policy makers, ensures that the political conversation will remain their conversation, it ensures that when we begin to talk about issues it will be the issues they want to discuss, and instead of Americans asking each other, for instance: "how much should we increase the minimum wage and raise taxes in order to provide decent jobs to working Americans and get a handle on our out of control deficit?" the question becomes "should we cut taxes only for the middle class or for both the middle class and the rich?" Meanwhile, those of us on the so-called progressive left find ourselves arguing against tax cuts for the rich, when we should really be spending our time arguing in favor of near universal tax increases. The Republicans, on the other hand, who have historically supported small government and free markets, have little need to worry in this situation, because regardless of where the debate goes, the government is going to offer to extend the Bush tax cuts in one way or another and thus continue to shrink the federal budget. It is a win-win, as they say, for the Republican Party, who have managed, even in the face of a huge Democratic majority to assert their power in a remarkably disproportionate manner.

It is because of this seemingly inborn ability to manipulate public opinion that the Republicans have managed to control the political conversation for the last thirty years, for they have managed to guarantee that underneath every leftist criticism of any Democrat, there will always be the specter of yet another disastrous Republican administration, lifting its tiny but ominous head saying: "President Palin, the people are waiting." This voice, however, regardless of how true the real threat of a Palin presidency might be, is the voice of conservatism and despair. It is the same working class voice that tells us to keep our heads down and not complain, to do our work, and to be happy with the crumbs we receive in exchange for our days and nights. It is the same middle class voice of stability and comfort and peace that urges us not to rock the boat and to look away from injustice; it is, Jon Stewart calling for the restoration of sanity in a world where the exhibition of sanity is nothing more than an affirmation of the status quo. Instead of allowing ourselves to be led by our fears, we should instead learn to recognize the power inherent in the outrage generated by the Tea Party Right.

The Tea Party has not only pulled the Republicans further to the right, but they have energized and excited a whole group of voters who would otherwise have stayed home on November 2, who instead of getting up early to vote, would have chosen to sleep in, or, who instead of voting after work, would have chosen instead to watch television or catch an early happy hour. The Democrats and especially Obama, on the other hand, have managed to completely squander and crush the vast store of enthusiasm that was generated by Obama's 2008 campaign. Indeed, a Gallup poll released September 27, 2010 reported that there was an enormous "enthusiasm gap" between likely Democrat and Republican voters. Of those Democrats polled, only 28 percent reported that they were "very enthusiastic" about voting, while an astonishing 48 percent of Republicans reported they were. This is a significant shift from 2008 when 61 percent of Democrats reported they were more enthusiastic about voting in 2008 than previous elections. Sadly, though, Obama's gap doesn't only hurt the Democrats, but hurts the left more broadly, for it generates not only a dispassion for party politics but a much more harmful spirit of apathy that is the real enemy of change. The Democrats have held such a monopoly on the left, that for many liberal minded or progressive voters there appear to be only two choices: support the democrats or stay home. And this is why building a grassroots movement outside the Democratic Party, one willing to criticize Obama and to push an aggressively socialist-democratic agenda is so crucial. As Leonard Cohen once sang: "Hey, why not ask for more."