

9/11/01: Ramifications on the US Social Order – An Early Impression

Kim Scipes*

The attacks of September 11th on the United States have had and continue to have a big impact on the US social order. However, I suggest these impacts are considerably different from those being discussed in any mainstream media outlet in this country, either in print or television. This article is an attempt to present an “alternative” view from a social change activist living and acting in Chicago, Illinois, USA.

The attacks truly shocked Americans. Obviously, the horrific pictures of the destruction and death that were incessantly shown on television and reproduced in our newspapers had a big impact. For a people who are so incredibly parochial and inwardly focused in regard to global affairs--despite the imperial impact of the US government and multinational corporations developed here--these attacks unquestionably made people aware that there was a world beyond our borders.

And let's not be surprised by this shock. For a people who have been taught that what the United States does in the world is always benign if not truly positive--the war in Viet Nam is almost always explained as an “aberration”--and whose country has not suffered a major attack from outside our borders since the British burned Washington, DC in 1812, these attacks were incomprehensible to most “ordinary” Americans.

The media (and, of course, the political elites) took advantage of this naiveté. In response to the general question of “why would anyone do this to *us?*,” the general response was that people hated our freedoms and our democracy. From the beginning, these attacks were presented by the media and governmental officials as attacks on the very existence of the United States, that it was an attack on our nation. The leading newspaper in the United States, *The New York Times*, had “U.S. ATTACKED” as its front page headline the day following the attacks. That following Sunday (September 16th), the *Chicago Tribune* headlined a special section on the attacks as “September 11, 2001: When evil struck America.”

The common response was one of solidarity with the victims of the attacks, expressed in a nationalistic manner: US flags proliferated *everywhere*. People gathered almost spontaneously, and I can remember vividly the marches in my community, a community that is comprised overwhelmingly of Latinos--mostly immigrants from Puerto Rico and Mexico--and mostly of working class people. This was not orchestrated from outside, but came from within our communities. Each march featured many US flags, as a sense of solidarity with the victims and reaffirming the dedication to this country.

But the media presented these genuine expressions of solidarity and sympathy as being expressions of patriotism, as support of whatever the political elites and the US Government were to do to ensure the safety of the US. In other words, they conflated the display of the US flag as being an expression of patriotism--and a certain type of patriotism at that--with expressions of solidarity and sympathy.

Out of this particular representation, the media called for a massive and military response to the “terrorism.” This, in turn, inspired President Bush and his allies to push the specific imperial policies they have since instituted in addition to the general imperial policies that have

long been in effect. At the same time, the media was pushing polling results for support of US war, and politicians could then use these poll results to justify their own pro-militaristic positions. So, news out of the United States almost uniformly claims that the American people are resolutely united behind President Bush.

I'm going to suggest that the real situation is much more ambiguous to date, although the many groups who actively oppose Bush and the political elites' war on the rest of the world have not been able to raise the cost to the elites sufficiently to stop US terrorism around the world. I do not want to overstate my position, and claim this is "just around the corner"--it certainly is not--but to argue that there is much, much more going on inside the US social order than most can even imagine. And while it will take a while--I certainly refuse to even suggest when--I think the attacks of 9/11 are going to reverberate within the US social order for a very long time.

To make this argument, I'm going to divide the rest of this essay into three sections. I focus on (1) the absolute failure of major US social institutions (military/intelligence; the media; and the government); (2) the undermining of the imperial promise of empire; and (3) Americans' increased questioning of today's social order. If I am correct, then, we are seeing the preconditions for social conflict within the United States that we have not seen since at least the 1960s and, more probably, since the mid 1930s-early 1940s.

1. The absolute failure of major US social institutions.

There are three major US social institutions that have failed to adequately respond to the attacks: the military/intelligence system, the news media; and the government. I discuss each in turn.

A) The military/intelligence system. This is the failure that is most obvious.

The US has spent not just billions of dollars but between 1.5-2 trillions (a trillion is 12-zeros, or a million millions) since 1945 to create the most powerful military/intelligence system the world has ever seen. While most of the post-World War II period has seen this military/intelligence power projected in offensive actions against other countries, ultimately it is intended to *defend* the United States from foreign attack. By any stretch of the imagination, or however one wants to define the situation, this entire system failed to defend the US from these attacks.

There's increasing evidence that the US was forewarned of impending attacks. An attack by a radical Muslim organization was thwarted in the Philippines in 1995--mainly by luck--that was to plant bombs on airliners flying over the Pacific Ocean and to detonate them in mid-air: the possibility of attacking airliners was well known. Closer to September 11th, President Bush was briefed on August 6, 2001 of possible impending attacks. It also turns out that the National Security Agency, which can "eaves drop" on electronic communications from around the world, had intercepted communications on September 10th which specifically suggested that something important would take place the next day. No warnings were given to tighten security at airlines.

Not only did the intelligence fail to pick up the activities of the attackers on their own, but they failed in light of a number of warnings from foreign intelligence services. We don't know all of the countries that warned the US that an attack was imminent, and perhaps never will, but Egypt specifically warned us. I have seen a report that not only did Israel's Mosad warn us--and this seems quite likely--but that they even passed this warning through the British, German and Russian intelligence agencies. In any case, it's clear that the US Government was forewarned.

And despite the failure of the intelligence system to prevent the attacks from even taking place, the military failed to respond in time to prevent even the third plane that threatened the White House and ultimately attacked the Pentagon. I'm giving the military the benefit of the doubt here: I can understand that they may not have anticipated the first airliner plowing into the World Trade Center in New York City and, once that happened, I can even understand that they would never expect that that would be duplicated. But once that second plane hit, it should have been obvious to even the most obtuse military commander that something unprecedented was taking place, and every unusual act involving commercial aircraft should have come under immediate suspicion.

Yet, despite an airliner taking off from Dulles International Airport west of Washington, DC, flying west across West Virginia and over southern Ohio--a couple hundred miles at least--then disappearing off of radar according to *The New York Times*, turning 180 degrees and heading east without getting permission of the air traffic control system which closely monitors each flight, and then flying back another 60 miles east of Dulles, flying over DC and making a big circular turn to attack the Pentagon, no interceptors were even launched by the military to even check it out, much less shoot it down.

According to The Times, the second plane had hit the World Trade Center at 9:06 am, and the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) closed all New York City airports at 9:17. At 9:40, the FAA grounded all flights in the country. At 9:45 am--39 minutes after the second plane went into the World Trade Center--American Airlines Flight 77 hit the Pentagon.

And yet, no fighter/interceptors were ever launched. Andrews Air Force Base, where the President's "Air Force One" is based, is 11 minutes away from Washington. There are also

numerous other military air bases in the vicinity of Washington, DC. No interceptors were ever launched.

That this happened is strange--and so far, unexplained. But the more we look into it, it gets even more curious. The US air traffic control system is run by the Federal Aviation Administration. The FAA has regulations regarding interception of "unidentified" aircraft, and FAA regulations see US airspace as a military "field"--in fact, there are protocols of what is to be done if the US is attacked and control of the airspace is handed to the US military. In other words, even though US airspace is ostensibly run by a civilian agency, in reality, it has long been permanently militarized by the US Government.

And here's where I have to share some of my background. I spent four years in the US Marine Corps between 1969-73 (and fortunately staying in the US all four years!). I was a sergeant at the time I got released from active duty, and served in the air wing as an avionics (airborne electronics) technician. So, while I cannot claim specific knowledge of what happened that September day, I *can* claim some general knowledge about how the military works on a day-to-day basis. And one of the things I am certain of is that the military has very specific plans, procedures and operations to ensure the control of US airspace--and that they periodically test to see if these plans and procedures are in fact operationable under actual conditions--as a means of ensuring the safety of the United States.

Not only that, but under US military doctrine as I understand it, there is no more important military installation in the world than the Pentagon. Along with this, not surprisingly, is the importance of the White House (not to mention Congress, Supreme Court and other governmental departments and agencies). I am not claiming that the US would fall apart if the Pentagon or White House were destroyed--obviously, they have back up facilities and plans to

ensure the continuation of governmental functions in case these sites were destroyed and/or their occupants killed--but there should be no better defended locality in this country (and probably the world) than the Washington, DC area.

One other thing is that all civilian commercial aircraft in the air are under the control of the FAA's air traffic control system. One can listen on some aircraft while flying--as I did in August 2000 as I flew between Baltimore (just slightly northeast of Washington) and Chicago--to the communications between all the aircraft under control of the same site as the aircraft you are flying on. So, if your aircraft is under command of site "x," you can not only hear communication between your pilots and the control center, but you can hear the communications between all planes under control of that same center and staff of that center. And each center has a certain jurisdiction, so when you reach the limits of center "x" you are "handed off" (transferred) to center "y" and so on, all across the United States. As far as I can ascertain, there is simply no area in the United States where a commercial aircraft is not under the surveillance and control of one specific air traffic control center.

In addition to verbal communication with a center, each aircraft carries a "transponder," which automatically identifies each aircraft with its corporate designation and flight number--I assume each aircraft's transponder would be set by the crew before each flight so a specific designation would be used. So while radar can locate an aircraft while flying, the transponder identifies that particular aircraft, so air traffic controllers always know which aircraft on their radar screen is which. So, an American Airlines aircraft--let's use flight 77-- would be continuously identified electronically as AA77 on the radar screens of controllers in each center in turn that had control over that flight.

And, again, if you listen to the control center/aircraft communications, what you hear is a controller and his/her aircraft crew working together as a team to get that aircraft safely through the airspace and on schedule. So, the controller will tell the crew what course heading to fly, what altitude to fly at, and at what speed: they want to keep all aircraft a specified distance from each other--both horizontally and vertically--and they don't want more than one plane to end up in the same area at the same time, such as trying to land at the same airport. Thus, while a flight crew will file a flight plan before taking off, this is their general intention of how they plan the flight--it is continuously reconsidered in flight and in relation to other aircraft and the weather, and the ongoing interaction between controller and crew will determine the actual flight path. It is due to this close communication process that air traffic is as safe as it is: in short, there is as little as possible that is not covered--air travel is not left to chance. (And my understanding is that this process occurs throughout the world.)

So, let's think about this. We have an aircraft hijacked somewhere over southern Ohio that is flying in a very controlled airspace. It makes a 180 degree turn, and goes off radar screens. (In reality, that aircraft could not go off the radar screens--this almost certainly means that the transponder was turned off/dismantled so it could no longer be automatically identified--but it would still be observable on radar as an airborne "object" even if unidentified.) I assume if the transponder was made inoperable, then voice communication with the various control centers was not taking place. This aircraft, then, flies over 200 miles toward what should be the most defended locality in the country, which would have to take somewhere at least around 30 minutes. That means that almost all of these events took place after the second plane hit the World Trade Center. Now, by any definition, I think this aircraft's behavior would have to be identified as questionable. And especially in light of two planes being flown into the World

Trade Center that very morning, no interceptors were ever launched to check out this aircraft's behavior...? It simply does not make sense to me. I cannot see all of this happening without specific, high-level intervention.

But let's understand something here that may not jump out at readers. I am not saying that someone tried to get the air traffic control system in its larger sense to act in ways that it was not designed to do--I am saying that someone got the air traffic control system not to do something it was specifically supposed to do. This is against the entire logic of the air traffic control system as I understand it.

To the best of my knowledge--I must state that this is speculation, albeit somewhat informed speculation--air traffic controllers should have immediately reported such aberrant behavior by an aircraft to their supervisor, even under "usual" circumstances. They might not have reported a transponder going out, but a large set of questionable behaviors--the transponder going out, the aircraft then making a 180 degree turn to the east which was almost certainly not part of the filed flight plan for a flight going west from Dulles to Los Angeles, a flight continuing after this turn for around a half hour (and thus not making an emergency landing, say in Cincinnati, Ohio), with no verbal communication: it seems almost impossible that this was not brought to some supervisor's attention, and especially during a period of time immediately after two planes had been flown into the World Trade Center and after the FAA grounded all flights in the country. And, in light of all of this, it seems almost certain that activities of this sort during such an emergency period would have been reported to the military, which it seems to me under almost any circumstance would have--at very least--launched interceptors to try to ascertain what was going on. And yet, I have seen no reports of any interceptors being launched.

Now, it may turn out that there was equipment failure or procedures not correctly implemented that caused interceptors not to be launched. That is always a possibility--and I, as a military veteran, recognize that the efficiency of the US military is far below that which it publicly projects. But the military hierarchy knows this, too, and undoubtedly has backup systems and plans to overcome any such failure. There is no way in hell this failure should have ever happened. Period.

So, we have a problem. Despite trillions of dollars being spent, and years of planning and testing procedures, and extensive training, there was an unprecedented set of intelligence and military operational failures. How this could happen, and why it was able to happen, must be explained: these failures will never be accepted until they are completely examined by an independent body and explained.

(B) The news media. From the very beginning, the corporate news media (“mass” media) has acted in amazingly similar manner, basically accepting official reports and transmitting them as gospel. There has been an incredible lack of skepticism toward government actions and statements from an institution that incessantly trumpets its important role in protecting US democracy through critical examination of corporate and political elites.

The media actually, at times, even has been a proponent of military action. While I can’t remember the specific headline, I remember one headline in the *Chicago Sun Times*, above a picture of a US aircraft carrier, saying something like “We’re Coming to Get You!”

This must be recognized to be taking place in the context of a media that almost never covers anything other than train wrecks or natural disasters in so-called “developing” countries.

Critical reporting has almost been totally absent from the US media. I have seen no effort to explain why any one could conceivably want to attack the United States. I have seen no

critical examination of US foreign or corporate policy. To the best of my recollection, there has not been any effort to point out that Bin Laden and the fundamentalist Mujdaheen were trained, funded and supported by the CIA during their war with the Soviets. I cannot remember seeing any discussion of why the US attacked Afghanistan when 15 of the 19 attackers were identified almost immediately as being from Saudi Arabia, and none have been identified as Afghani. Nor has there been almost any critical examination of the US war against Afghanistan--the few US reporters that were sent into the region more than likely had no experience in or knowledge about the region previously, and almost certainly had no native language skills. (If you compare what has been reported in the British media--particularly by reporters such as Robert Fisk and John Pilger--with that in the US media, it would make you sick at the propaganda we have been fed by the US media.)

On top of that, there has been almost no effort to examine reports by media of other countries. Thus, developments identified by foreign reporters--such as ties between Bin Laden's family and the Bush family, particularly through the Carlyle Group, or the report that the head of the CIA station visited Bin Laden last year when the latter was in the hospital in, I believe, Oman--are not even examined; they are ignored. There has been almost a conscious effort NOT to get to the bottom of things.

And as Israel has projected Palestinian aspirations and efforts for independence as being "terroristic," the US media has almost unquestionably accepted, amplified and then projected this propaganda. There is almost no subtlety to this process. President Arafat--not my idea of a democrat to say the least--has been demonized as a terrorist, and thus any efforts to get rid of him are acceptable. The only change has been that the media has reported the increased conflict

that has taken place in the region, so Americans at least have learned that there is a lot of conflict currently taking place. But the conflict is *obviously* created by the suicide bombers.

Where there has been some reporting has been on domestic developments in the US since the attack. The Bush Administration--whose very election itself was an affront to democratic principles and our established practices--has been working overtime to trample traditional American freedoms: sometimes attacking general rights, but specifically attacking rights of Muslims and people from Western Asia (who, following British imperial policy, are generally referred to as being from the "Middle East.") Some of this has been reported.

And once in a while, some Democratic politician will screw up her/his courage and say something critical of the president or the way he is conducting US affairs. While keeping these complaints very specific and limited, there is some slight reporting of these critiques. After all, the media feels it necessary to maintain the fiction of two political alternatives available to US citizens.

However, in general, all Bush has to do is claim "we're in a time of war," and the media shoves its tail between its legs, and whimpers away.

Where this can particularly be seen is around the myriad of corporate scandals currently coming to light in this country. The most obvious case is the corporation called "Enron," which is an energy company. The head of Enron was/is a close personal friend of George Bush's--and a very major campaign contributor over the years. Enron spent tons of money to effect the US political process in addition to helping to elect Bush: they contributed to so many politicians, such as US Attorney General John Ashcroft, that these politicians have had to remove themselves from any investigation of the corporation's activities. The entire US Attorney's Office in Houston--which is the chief Federal law enforcement agency in a city--had to remove

itself from investigations because each US Attorney had ties to Enron or its staff. And, of course, they lobbied extensively to get their view of the world accepted throughout the US Government. Thus, the business failure of Enron--which has been fairly well reported--is at the same time the epitome of a political scandal, where a corporation got access and actively intervened to get government legislation and regulatory findings to enhance its business operations. This has not been well reported.

But the scandal is more extensive than that. Because of Enron's close ties to senior members of the Bush Administration, its leaders were given privileged access to high level administration members--specifically including Vice President Dick Cheney and his committee to establish US oil policy--so it was intimately involved in not only setting US oil policy but, more importantly, US foreign policy in general. The Enron-Bush Administration connection is a scandal that far exceeds its business failure--at one time the 5th largest US corporation, but now in bankruptcy--and is a scandal that directly illuminates how corporate America has been able to subvert our democratic processes and undermine American democracy in its entirety. But you won't find any serious examination of that in our corporate media.

(C) The political system. Where all of this comes together is in our political system.

There has been an almost total failure of our governmental "leaders" since 9/11: they may bleat here and there, but they have lined up to follow Bush in a manner that lemmings wish they could replicate. After the September attacks, out of 525 US representatives in Congress, only one--an African-American woman named Barbara Lee--had the courage to oppose the blank check being given George Bush. The "dime's worth" of difference between the Republicans and Democrats--a dime is worth 10 pennies or 1/10th of a dollar, an almost inconsequential difference--is probably less than one penny today in regard to US foreign policy.

Accordingly, there has been almost no substantive debate among governmental representatives as to the US role in the world and its militaristic approach to every situation that cannot be bought off by massive amounts of economic and/or financial aid.

What we have here is a total lack of imagination by the US political and economic elites, even regarding their own interests. George Bush promises us war in perpetuity, and almost no one at an official level dissents. No one points out that Israel has been carrying out the exact same policy--perhaps with less sophistication, perhaps with more--and it has not been what I'd call an overwhelming success. But we cannot worry about that--after all, to our Christian Fundamentalist president, "We have God on our side!" (Fundamentalists are not confined to Jewish or Muslim religions--there are more than enough Christian Fundamentalists in this country alone!)

But the problem made obvious since 9/11 with our political system is that there is no alternative to the Democrats and Republicans. They either represent you, or you are, in the American colloquialism, "Shit out of luck" (S-O-L).

And this brings me to my larger point about developments in this country: to carry out is political program, the political elite does not have to gain acceptance by the citizenry--they only have to gain apparent acquiescence. And to a very large degree, they have achieved this. There is protest--especially at an intellectual level--but it has not developed to the extent that it questions the legitimacy of the elites.

2. The undermining of the imperial promise of empire.

I'm going to take the above to a more general level: I believe the failures of these social institutions are a direct threat to the imperial promise of empire. What do I mean by this?

We have to go back to the end of World War II for this to make sense. The US was the only major industrial country in the world to emerge with its economic and political systems unscathed--every country in which the war had been fought had been devastated, and this included every other industrialized country. The US political and economic elites--seeking to replace the British Empire, but fearing the political consequences of another economic depression--worked to establish a political-economic-cultural system that would dominate the non-Soviet dominated parts of the world and would provide economic stability in the "mother" country. The US military was key to this imperial plan, but it was more than just pure military domination: it included economic, political and cultural domination. The world's economy was taken off of gold and placed on the US dollar, and US productive processes were overwhelming: in 1948, the United States alone produced 48% of the entire world's goods and services! This was supplemented by the establishment of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, as well as US domination of the UN. And, of course, it was supplemented by establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency, CIA, or as a friend of mine calls it, the Committee to Intervene Anywhere!

Yet, this was not enough to guarantee the acceptance of this imperial system by the American population. After all, the 1930s and '40s had seen the emergence of one of the most powerful labor movements in the world, and the left--especially the Communist Party--had sufficient roots in the US experience to be seen as a real threat to the social order.

The political and economic elites addressed these concerns in a couple of ways. First, during what is now known as the McCarthy era--named after a reactionary US Senator, Joe McCarthy--but which really started during World War II, there was a policy of repression

directed against the left. This took place particularly within the labor movement, but it later spread throughout the entire society.

The second thing, and most importantly for this article, the elites made a “deal” with more conservative social leaders, including most labor leaders. The deal was that if “society” would give the elites carte blanche in running the world, the elites would guarantee economic prosperity across the society along with security from foreign attack.

And particularly between 1948 and 1973, the elites stuck to the deal. Real family incomes during the period--i.e., after inflation was excluded--doubled across the entire society. It did not result in the undermining of differences between income categories, but it did mean that members of each category doubled their incomes.

Without wanting to prolong this discussion, let me say that this economic betterment that included every income category--there were differences based on race and gender within each category, but here I speak of each income category as a whole--in the 1948-73 period has fallen apart. Americans’ economic security and well-being have drastically deteriorated since 1973. Income today for the average American, when inflation is removed, is below that of 1979. At the same time, income inequality in this country is extreme: when I compare US income inequality levels to global levels reported by the CIA, the level of income inequality in this country today is comparable to that of low-end “developing” countries. It is really that bad.

But these facts are almost never reported in the corporate media. Every now and then, though, something slips through: in late June, *The New York Times* reported that average income of corporate Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) is 410 times that of the average worker! (It was only 70 times larger in 1985.)

What I'm trying to convey here is that the economic situation of most Americans is deteriorating, absolutely as well as relatively. While we have generally nice houses--although nothing like those portrayed in the movies and on TV!--and many "goodies," the reality is that most Americans are living off their credit cards. We are a nation of people in extreme indebtedness.

That should not be a big surprise. The US Government is also living off of debt. Our balance of trade deficit has broken records in each of the past six years. Bush's tax "reform"--with benefits going almost totally to the very rich--along with the financial valuation crash of the stock market and related incomes that we are currently experiencing, has again thrown the US Government's budget into deficit.

If the world's economic system was not based on the dollar, as a country, we'd be SOL. Being the dominant imperialist country means never having to say you are sorry.

But while that may be true in relation to other countries, the worsening economic situation among most Americans cannot be so easily dismissed. Certainly one part of the imperial promise has many holes punched through it. More, I'm sorry to say, will be coming.

The main ramification of September 11th, however, is that the other part of the "deal" is also worthless. The US state can no longer promise to protect us, to keep us safe from what the elites do to the rest of the peoples of the world.

However, not only can they no longer protect us, but we must accept their disemboweling of the very freedoms and democratic processes that they've told us all along makes our country special, that is our "Americanness." This has not been clearly presented to the American public, but I think all developments over the last few months point in this direction. The maintenance of the social order *uber alles*.

3. Americans' increased questioning of today's social order.

I've painted a fairly harsh critique of developments in the United States, and certainly presented an account of developments in this country that are in almost total variance with those presented by the corporate media. What does this mean?

Two things are taking place across this country, albeit in different locations, episodically, and with relative little coordination: one, there is a fairly high level of activism taking place, challenging various social conditions here and abroad; and two, the economic security and sense of well-being for many "ordinary" Americans is under tremendous assault.

Especially since the anti-World Trade Organization demonstrations in Seattle in late 1999, there has been a real re-emergence of activism across the country. Globalization is being challenged more and more as Americans see "our" jobs being exported across our borders. (Please let me explain: the overwhelming number of Americans do not consider the gross inequality between "first world" and "third world" countries, nor do they generally even think about the well-being of people in other countries. This can be, and often is manipulated into a very nationalist protest against workers in other countries "stealing our jobs." However, this global ignorance is being contested to a greater and greater extent by globally-focused activists.) Along with this is an anti-sweatshop movement that has spread particularly across college campuses, and has done so quicker than the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) spread in the 1960s! This movement is specifically focused on challenging multinational corporations' exploitation of "third world" workers.

There are numerous other movements that exist. There are those challenging police violence in particularly African-American and Latino communities; those that are challenging gender oppression; there are those challenging ecological devastation; there are movement

fighting gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender oppression; there are those fighting against nuclear weapons and energy. The list is much longer than just this.

The long and short of it is that a greater percentage of young people today have participated in demonstrations of one type or another (40%) than ever did during the 1960s (19%). And a nation-wide poll of over 280,000 entering college students this year reported that more students considered themselves left of liberal than any time since 1966. In short, there is a level of activism taking place that one could never guess from reading the corporate media. And over 100,000 Americans took to the streets in April of this year to protest Bush's war against everything living, with strong, explicit support for the Palestinian struggle. (Our left, with a disproportionate number of Jews in it, has long been highly divided over events in Palestine-- these demonstrations indicated that among the left, the rights of the Palestinians are recognized by nearly all!)

But, again, I should not exaggerate: this is not taking place at comparable rates across the country. Much protest is localized in specific geographical areas such as San Francisco, Seattle, New York and Boston, and on college campuses. On the other hand, however, it is not limited to these sites.

Another area that has generated increasing concern, spreading beyond just activists, but slowing spreading to "ordinary" Americans is recognition of global warming and the ongoing ecological devastation. People haven't necessarily figured all of this out, but almost everyone in this region knows that people should not be wearing shorts in Chicago in January, which they were this last year. The midwestern US is a farming region, and people are aware of the weather in very profound ways--and they know something is not right. (Admittedly, however, most of them are not doing anything about it yet: but it does have their concern.) People see the Bush

Administration wanting to increase oil drilling in Alaska, while cutting funds to clean up gross ecological pollution, and continuing to fund for highway construction--and they worry.

At the same time, as I suggested above, the economic situation for most Americans has been deteriorating for a number of years. Lifetime jobs are almost non-existent today when they used to be plentiful. There have been millions of jobs eradicated over the past couple of years--and these have affected those at all income levels, although most have been toward the middle and below. Although all of our political “leaders” have been saying how mild our 2001-02 recession was, I know that I was signed up with five temporary employment firms in Chicago and got one call during the entire summer--and I am highly skilled, typing 65 words per minute and having years of experience!

We have had several years--1997 to 2000--where we had tremendous economic growth in this country. There was a massive increase in “ordinary” Americans putting their money into the stock market, as that was presented as a “sure fire” way to retire well. The on-going corporate failures and exposes of the last half year or so have cost these people collectively billions of dollars, as they’ve seen their retirement nest eggs evaporate in a puff of smoke. And they also see that nobody in political leadership roles really cares about this.

In short, I see these processes developing during the same time period, albeit with little connection. And I am certain that conditions will not create organization or rebellion. These activists must find ways to connect with, inspire and mobilize “ordinary” people to get active. Relatively little of this is taking place--so far. But there is an increasing understanding among activists that this needs to be done.

CONCLUSIONS

The social well-being of many Americans is not anywhere near the level that used to exist in the 1948-73 period. Yes, we have more things. But we have more violence in our communities, poorer schools, less economic security, ect. And more ecological devastation.

We also have a political culture of individualism that the political elite has been trying to develop for over 20 years in a direct effort to ensure the collective culture of the 1960s never re-emerges. They have done their job much too well: people are really socially isolated in this social order, and that certainly limits political discussion and mobilization. But it also means that the social problems that are effecting more and more families must be confronted on an individual basis. People's resources are limited, and cannot often be sustained alone for long.

The expansion of activism is heartening. There are many lessons that need to be relearned, and many new things that must be developed. But the questioning *is* going on--and growing. Where it goes, and how, remains to be seen. However, there are a lot of really bright people trying to figure these things out.

The importance of all this is that Bush's approach to the attacks of 9/11 is bogus. If one reads e-mail list serves, it is obvious that Bush has lost the intellectual war over his "war without end." As the contradictions get exposed, and as people interact over this nonsense, I think we'll see an escalation of protest and internal social conflict in this country. Whether activists can channel it to the extent that it causes the political and economic elites to retreat because it threatens their interests or not remains to be seen. But the potential is there.

And that's part of the stuff one never gets from the corporate media.

*Kim Scipes is Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago.