OMNI ECONOMIC JUSTICE: POVERTY NEWSLETTER #1, Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace and Justice, May 3, 2012

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Related topics: Capitalism, Corporations, Economic Justice USA, Equality, Inequality, Failed States, Occupation Wall Street, Rich and Poor, Social Justice,

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Film: The End of Poverty?
Colbert Report
Programs for the Poor
Jubilee USA
Barbara Ehrenreich: Criminalizing the Poor
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Books

1. The End of Poverty? (2008) - IMDb
www.imdb.com/title/tt0903943/Cached - Similar
You +1'd this publicly. Undo
Rating: 6.6/10 - 167 votes
Directed by Philippe Diaz. With John ... A phenomenal discourse on why poverty exists when there is so much wealth in the world. A must ... The End of Poverty?
Directed by Philippe Diaz. Starring John Christensen, William Easterly.
Trivia - Plot Summary - Videos - Memorable quotes

2. Anti-Capitalist Rerun - Tyler Cowen - The American Interest
Magazine
www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=601Cached - Similar
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The latest contribution to the genre, The End of Poverty, from filmmaker and scriptwriter Philippe Diaz, is even dimmer than the norm. It devotes 106 minutes to ...

3. SYNOPSIS - The End Of Poverty
www.endofpoverty.com/synopsis.html/Cached - Similar
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Renowned actor and activist, Martin Sheen, narrates The End of Poverty?, a feature-length documentary directed by award-winning director, Philippe Diaz, ...

4. The End Of Poverty
www.endofpoverty.com/Cached - Similar

5. 'The End of Poverty?': movie review - CSMonitor.com
   www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Movies/2009/.../p17s08-almo.html Cached - Similar

   Dec 4, 2009 – But the movie review points out that 'The End of Poverty? ... Philippe Diaz, the writer-director of this latest frontal assault, starts way back in ...

6. Filmmaker Philippe Diaz on "The End of Poverty?"
   www.democracynow.org/.../filmmaker_philippe_diaz...

   Earlier this year, the IMF and the World Bank warned that the financial crisis posed a serious challenge to ...

HOMEPAGE VIDEO:
Colbert Report: "Poor" in America
Intro: "A Heritage Foundation report proves that as long as 'poor' Americans have refrigerators and the strength to brush flies off their eyeballs, they're not really poor."

In the face of historic deficits, the nation faces unavoidable choices about how to balance needs and resources and allocate burdens and sacrifices. These choices are economic, political—and moral.
As Christians, we believe the moral measure of the debate is how the most poor and vulnerable people fare. We look at every budget proposal from the bottom up—how it treats those Jesus called "the least of these" (Matthew 25:45). They do not have powerful lobbies, but they have the most compelling claim on our consciences and common resources. The Christian community has an obligation to help them be heard, to join with others to insist that programs that serve the most vulnerable in our nation and around the world are protected. God is calling us to pray, fast, give alms and to speak out for justice.
The following is a statement by church leaders from diverse theological and political beliefs who have come together to form a Circle of Protection around programs that serve the most vulnerable in our nation and around the world. All people are invited to sign the statement and we'll send a copy to President Obama and your members of Congress. (Click here for the statement and list of originating signers.)

1,000 and counting – Join Us
Brooke Harper, Jubilee USA to jbennet  5-6-11
coord@jubileeusa.org

Dear Dick,
Spring is here and with the new season Jubilee has created new opportunities for you to aid in our campaign for economic justice. Join our latest effort to spread the word of Jubilee across the country and work for debt relief and just economic policies for the world’s poorest nations.

Jubilee’s 1000 Faith Leaders Initiative
People of faith and conscience throughout the country are raising their voices with our 1,000 Faith Leaders Initiative. To date, we have 1,000 faith leaders and over 18 heads of denominations signed onto a letter urging President Obama to institute reforms that help the world’s poorest. Ask your faith leader to sign on today and join this growing movement of leaders in speaking for the poorest to President Obama.

Voices of Esther

Join your faith leaders in speaking out and taking action. Just as Queen Esther spoke to King Xerxes to save the lives of the Israelites, we must also raise our voices to save the lives of those crippled by debt. Jubilee has created new religious lessons for children and adults to learn about poverty and debt through our new Voices of Esther resources. To help your congregation act as Esther did for the global community, we have designed postcards for Congress and President Obama that raise up the voices of the poor. Sign a postcard online today. If you would like to spread the word of Jubilee to your community and congregation order our new Voices of Esther postcards today. We ask for a small donation to cover production and shipping costs.

Together, we can build a just world. No one will deny that the economic and political climate may be the most difficult we’ve seen in a decade. Jubilee has faced challenges before and won – we continue to celebrate debt cancellation for more than thirty poor countries and shifts in the way International Financial Institutions do business. We can win again, and we must. Join us this spring in continuing our journey to economic justice for the world’s poorest.

Sincerely,
Brooke Harper
Jubilee USA Network | 212 E Capitol St NE Washington DC 20003 | 202.783.3566
Barbara Ehrenreich | How America Criminalized Poverty
Tom Dispatch/Guardian UK
Barbara Ehrenreich: "Stop the institutional harassment of those who turn to the government for help or find themselves destitute in the streets. Maybe, as so many Americans seem to believe today, we can't afford the kinds of public programs that would genuinely alleviate poverty - though I would argue otherwise. But at least we should decide, as a bare minimum principle, to stop kicking people when they're down."
READ MORE http://www.readersupportednews.org/opinion2/287-124/6973-how-america-criminalised-poverty

Cornel West: "A Declaration of War on The Poor", Nation of Change, August 10, 2011
Video Interview: The veteran broadcaster Tavis Smiley and the author and Princeton University Professor Cornel West are in the midst of a 15-city, cross-country trek they have dubbed "The Poverty Tour: A Call to Conscience." The tour comes on the heels of last week’s deficit agreement, which has been widely criticized for excluding a tax hike on the wealthy, as well as any measures to tackle high unemployment. "Any legislation that doesn’t extend unemployment benefits, doesn’t close a single corporate loophole, doesn’t raise one cent in terms of new revenue in terms of taxes on the rich or the lucky, allows corporate America to get away scot-free again—the banks, Wall Street getting away again—and all these cuts ostensibly on the backs of everyday people," says Smiley. READ | DISCUSS | SHARE http://www.nationofchange.org/cornel-west-declaration-war-poor-1312991410
What Would Michael Harrington Say?

Maurice Isserman

April 25, 2012  |  This article appeared in the May 14, 2012 edition of The Nation.

Well into his 80s, Socialist Party leader and six-time presidential candidate Norman Thomas remained in demand as a speaker at political gatherings and protest rallies. Troubled by arthritis and dependent on a cane, he would take a while to reach the speaker’s podium. On such occasions he’d sometimes bring down the house, rasping by way of self-introduction, “Creeping socialism.”

Thomas died in 1968, shortly after his eighty-fourth birthday. Michael Harrington, who succeeded him as the pre-eminent figure of American socialism, had been one of the very few to sign up for membership in the Young People’s Socialist League, the youth affiliate of the battered remnants of the Socialist Party, at the height of the McCarthy era in 1951. A tireless organizer, prolific writer and charismatic orator, Harrington became famous as “the man who discovered poverty” with the 1962 publication of The Other America, a work credited with sparking Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. Later he would found Democratic Socialists of America, successor to the Socialist Party. Harrington hoped to have as many years as his mentor Thomas to spread the socialist gospel. That was not to be. He died of cancer in 1989 at the age of 61. Had Harrington lived, he would have turned 84 this past February.
In the 1960s the term “creeping socialism” was used by some conservatives to suggest that Democratic-sponsored social welfare programs like the War on Poverty and Medicare were way stations on the road to the abolition of capitalist enterprise and individual liberty. After falling into disuse, the term has enjoyed a spectacular renaissance in recent years. Linked to “Obama” in a Google search, it produces more than 400,000 results.

Given the frequency with which the administration is charged with carrying out a socialist agenda (and not just by fringe activists—Newt Gingrich wrote a book titled *To Save America: Stopping Obama’s Secular Socialist Machine*), it might be interesting to speculate on what an authentic socialist like Harrington would have to say about today’s politics, had he been granted the four score and four years his predecessor was.

Historians are trained, rightly so, to be suspicious of counterfactuals. (Perhaps if Harrington had lived to be 84, he might have picked up a copy of *The Road to Serfdom* one day and had a late-life conversion to Austrian economics, unlikely as that seems.) But if anyone has the right to channel Harrington’s thoughts from the afterlife, it’s his sons, Alec and Ted Harrington. Before venturing my own opinions, I first put to them the question, “What would Mike have to say today?”

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For Alec Harrington, a New York theater director, teacher and playwright, the biggest difference between the world his father knew at his death and the world today was the intervening collapse of Soviet-bloc Communism—a peaceful revolutionary upheaval that began within months of Harrington’s death:

My father would be relieved to hear Republicans identify creeping socialism with European
welfare states and not Soviet totalitarianism. Though Michael was proudly a socialist, he was first and foremost a democrat (small “d”), and champion of freedom. And so, there is no question in my mind that he would see the world as a better place today than it was on the day he died because so many people have greater (if not sufficient—see Vladimir Putin and Victor Orbán) freedom. In keeping with this, he would be thrilled by the Arab Spring.

Harrington certainly would have welcomed Communism’s demise in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. He also would have expected that with Soviet Communism out of the picture, democratic socialists in the United States and elsewhere would be relieved of the burden of explaining how their own vision—that is, a well-regulated market economy with a strong public sector, committed in equal measure to policies guaranteeing basic economic security and political freedom—differed from Communist totalitarianism. He might have been surprised to see how effortlessly conservatives in recent years shifted from attacking their liberal opponents as being soft on Soviet Communism to being soft on Western European social democracy, as if the two are equivalent and indistinguishable evils. For Gingrich and Rick Santorum, it’s axiomatic that the Obama administration is plotting to bring “socialism” to America; in Mitt Romney’s slightly more nuanced version, it’s a “European-style entitlement society” that Obama has in mind. Gingrich memorably doubled down on the xenophobic side of the fear of Western European socialism by damning his rival Romney for speaking French.

Harrington not only spoke French; he was known to speak it with the likes of France’s socialist leader, François Mitterrand. In 1980, on the eve of Mitterrand’s election as president of France, Harrington organized a “Eurosocialism” conference in Washington, attended by the French socialist dignitary and by West Germany’s Chancellor Willi Brandt, Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme and a host of other past and future European leaders. Harrington thought
then, and almost certainly would think today, that most Americans would enjoy better and more productive lives if they had the kinds of social welfare benefits, starting with national health insurance, introduced by socialist-led governments in Europe. Recent studies showing that the average European enjoys better health, longer life and even greater social mobility than his or her US counterpart would seem to Harrington a vindication of his admiration for the Eurosocialists.

As for domestic politics, Ted Harrington, a New York City staff attorney, believes his father would be appalled by the scorched-earth tactics and incivility that prevail in the United States today:

When Michael was alive he could have civil debates with people like Bill Buckley, and Democrats and Republicans were capable of working together to achieve “common sense ideas”—a willingness to compromise that President Obama has pointed out has been abandoned in favor of bitter ideological wars. When Michael was alive you held your ground, but you also knew there was the possibility of finding a middle ground with your opponent. Today you hold your ground in order to destroy your opponent—no matter that the world is crumbling around you.

That too seems right. Harrington liked to describe his political stance as being on “the left wing of the possible.” He was a committed proponent of his socialist ideology, capable of citing chapter and verse in the Marxist canon to support his viewpoint—but, at the same time, temperamentally, no ideologue. He was a gifted crafter of coalitions, and it was coalition-building that was the heart of his political strategy. He worked with leaders and activists from civil rights, labor, environmentalist and feminist movements, encouraging them all to work for a common progressive agenda, which often required compromise on everyone’s part. And,
outside the confines of the left, he enjoyed the rough-and-tumble of spirited debate with opponents far to his right, particularly in the many debates he had on college campuses with National Review publisher William F. Buckley, and his many appearances on Buckley’s television show Firing Line.

On the other hand, there were certain bedrock positions from which Harrington did not waver, including his commitment to civil rights, civil liberties and the social gains of the New Deal and Great Society. In the first year of the Reagan administration, he castigated Congressional Democrats who “either stood idly by while reactionaries mounted their savage attack on social programs, particularly those aimed at helping the working poor or, worse, joined in the destruction of gains they themselves had pioneered.” A close associate of Martin Luther King Jr. throughout the 1960s, Harrington would have found inspiring the election of the nation’s first African-American president in 2008. But I doubt he would be pleased with President Obama’s willingness to consider cuts to Social Security and Medicare as a gesture toward bipartisanship. Mike would recall that the original Medicare bill passed Congress in 1965 with the aid of seventy Republican votes in the House and thirteen in the Senate; he would be dismayed by the extreme rightward ideological trek taken by the GOP since then, resulting in not a single Republican vote in the House or Senate for President Obama’s Affordable Care Act in 2010.

* * *

Here are a few other educated guesses as to what Mike would say today:

1. Harrington would be troubled by the decline of organized labor (which still represented nearly a quarter of American workers in the 1980s compared with fewer than 12 percent
today), outraged at the attacks on public sector workers unions and encouraged that the labor movement and its allies have mobilized to defend hard-won collective-bargaining rights in Wisconsin and elsewhere.

2. Harrington would be appalled by Romney’s comment that he’s “not concerned about the very poor”—but also disappointed that many Democratic politicians seem averse to saying or doing anything on behalf of the “Other America” he championed in 1962. He would be dismayed to discover that 46 million Americans, nearly one in six, are living in poverty, according to the 2010 census—a decline in the percentage of the poor since the 1960s, but in absolute numbers virtually unchanged since the publication of *The Other America*.

3. Harrington would be encouraged by the impact of Occupy Wall Street in highlighting the issue of income inequality and tax fairness, particularly by the role of young people in sparking the movement (well into his later years, Harrington liked to describe himself as “America’s oldest living young socialist”). He would also find it encouraging that in a recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, 49 percent of 18-to-29-year-old Americans held positive views of socialism, compared with 47 percent with a similar view of capitalism.

4. Finally, Harrington would not conclude that socialism, creeping or otherwise, was on the immediate horizon. If anything, he would recognize that attaining anything comparable to Western European social democracy here is further in the future today than a half-century ago. Harrington came of age politically in the 1950s and achieved his greatest influence in the 1960s. His worldview was rooted in the assumptions of the New Deal, World War II and the quarter-century of prosperity that ensued. For him and his generation of socialists, the existence of a powerful labor movement was a given, as was the widely shared belief that government was a force for good, with liberal politicians the wise stewards of the wealth
generated by a steadily expanding economy. A coalition between labor and liberal activist groups, founded on the solid foundation of self-interest and civic high-mindedness, could accomplish great things. It is, at least to some, still an appealing vision—but how relevant it remains today is a good question.

Still, in the end Harrington was an optimist, with an abiding faith in the ability of the American people to ultimately make the right choices. He liked to quote Dr. King to the effect that “the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice,” a sentiment that President Obama occasionally echoes in his speeches. And maybe that’s the most important thing Michael Harrington would have to say to us were he alive today. n\n
Maurice Isserman
April 25, 2012 | This article appeared in the May 14, 2012 edition of The Nation.

BOOKS
--Fitzpatrick, Kevin. Unhealthy Cities: Poverty, Race, and Place in America
The purpose of this book is to show the important role that space and place plays in the health of urban residents, particularly those living in high poverty ghettos. Our health is often dramatically affected by where we live; some parts of the city seem to be designed to make people sick.
--Harrington, Michael. The Other America. Reissue, 50th Anniversary ed.
--Isserman, Maurice. The Other American: the Life of Michael Harrington.