

JULY 11, 2005

# IN THESE TIMES



## ENVIRONMENTALISM IS DEAD.

## WHAT'S NEXT?



\$2.95 USA \$4.50 CANADA





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A unified left cannot be built by putting together a laundry list of worthy causes in the hope of building a non-ideological coalition. How to unite people across lines of parochial interest and in favor of the general interest is what we will have to teach ourselves.

JAMES WEINSTEIN  
THE LONG DETOUR



# Editorial

## Move Over, Boomers By Jessica Clark

In his interview with two 30-something environmentalists who have challenged the movement's status quo, Contributing Editor

Adam Werbach asks if the baby boomers are to blame for the sad state of affairs. "What should these leaders do now?" he asks. "Die?" ("No More of the Same," p. 21)

No blood need be shed, but many boomers are reluctantly being forced to make way for younger activists with a crop of new ideas. Pragmatic, visionary and entrepreneurial, these "practivists," molded by the social and political trends of the last 15 years, are reshaping progressive politics.

Raised during the heyday of ecological activism and the rise of a post-industrial networked society, practivists are steeped in systems thinking. Having come of age during the fall of the Berlin Wall, they are suspicious of nationalism and artificial dualities, a mistrust further informed by academic and political training in deconstructing absolute identity categories like race or gender. PRACTIVISTS prefer to emphasize similarities rather than dwell in the "silos" of various "isms."

Like other, less-politicized members of their cohort, practivists are also savvy consumers and media critics. They see politics as a fluid field of choice rather than a hard-and-fast test of their own radical identities, and understand both the value and the artificiality of branding,

sizzle and interactivity. Their political and cultural mobility allows them to imagine alliances that confound older activists trained in identity politics or issue-based organizing.

"The old era of political party identification is giving way to a disaggregated thunderdome of cause-based politics, distributed democracy, MoveOn house parties and do-it-yourself politics," writes Dan Carol in *Alternet's* new book, *Start Making Sense*. "Peer-to-peer politics ... is replacing the party as the place where new stuff happens."

Democrats, unions, and progressive membership organizations are all scrambling to attract the practivists, whose technical skills and yen for actually earning a living make them both valuable and hard to retain.

The class interests of the practivists may be their weakest link. Taught that identifying with or romanticizing the oppressed is akin to colonizing them, many of these bloggers, culture jammers and radical consultants operate from a place of privilege not rooted in working America. Howard Dean's call for small-donor support of the Democratic party, for example, applies more to middle-class

voters with cable modems and time for meet-ups than to workers struggling to raise children and navigate the minefields of economic instability and mass culture.

In their enthusiasm for new projects, practivists run the risk of replicating the boomers' mistake of turning their backs on the experiences of their predecessors. Critics may also find the practivists' calls for a kinder, more cooperative politics insufficiently tough—of a piece with George Lakoff's description of progressives as following a "nurturant parent" model. While this comparison has its appeal, it's uncomfortably similar to smears of the left as effete, wishy-washy, and weak—or, as California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger puts it, "girly."

This brings us to one of the not-so-dirty secrets of the practivists: Many are women, as educated, technically skilled and ambitious as their male counterparts, but less interested in inter-organizational competition and high-profile ideological sparring. Trained and inspired by feminism, they have explored the limitations of that movement and seek wider horizons. Some bide their time—as the grayer heads of their respective movements grandstand—by creating valuable infrastructure within and between their organizations. Others have started their own strategic and interconnected projects.

Either way, practivists have had enough of waiting for their elders to realize that their skills are exactly what's needed to forge the emerging progressive coalitions many now seek. ■