

COMMONWEAL

Gordon L. Bowen
TERROR ON CAMPUS

The Editors
S. AFRICA'S CRISIS

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**FROM THE COUNCIL
TO THE SYNOD**



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straightfaced, "It's my job. It's called diplomacy." For one brief shining moment, Hare addresses the issues of sincerity and conformity *ambiguously*, as Molière might. MacKellen is at least able to throw Streep back momentarily — before she resorts to another tantrum. For once in my life, I found myself cheering a bureaucrat.

Perhaps *Plenty* might have worked if its opening gave a deeper sense of how the war molded Streep's character. It opens promisingly, with a picturesque freeze frame of Streep on a secret operation in France. But the war scenes degenerate quickly, with Streep resorting to some typical nervous gestures when encountering another English agent (Sam Neill), and then going on to a tremulous one-night stand with him. War makes people nervous, to be sure, and needy. But Streep's character is unbelievable, and unadmirable, because she's *already* hysterical and maladjusted; we don't need postwar proof of that. Moreover, she says nothing about why she's there, why she fought — except in a later anniversary television interview where she sounds about as convincing as she did in *Kramer vs. Kramer* describing how she "found herself" in therapy in California. Played this way, Streep never seems to have had ideals to lose. An actress of more secure tragic gifts

might have conveyed something deeper in these scenes.

In truth, another actress was available, Kate Nelligan. She played the role on Broadway, and was offered the film part after Streep initially turned it down. When Streep reconsidered, Neilligan was dropped (so much for sincerity and authenticity). But Nelligan might have given the early scenes the authority they need. She has fire and flint, as anyone who saw *Eye of The Needle* (1981) can witness, and as *Eleni*, a December release about a heroine of the Greek civil wars, will probably attest.

The producers went with Streep for obvious box office reasons. There's an apparently unquenchable need in our age of cultural boom for lofty icons. Meryl Streep supposedly fits the bill for some people. She's the ultimate Designer Actress, she has a Yale imprint, and in *Plenty* she even comes equipped with an English accent. But in fact Streep has abandoned her real gift — for comedy — which made her theatrical name. In film, with all her nervousness, she has struck gold only once, with *Sophie's Choice*, and there perhaps her best line was a comic malapropism on a searsucker suit. Her natural gift is humor. In tragedy she resorts to mannerisms, and at heroism she's out of her depth.

TOM O'BRIEN

Books: **DEMOCRACY— & RENTING HUMANS**

IN THIS short book, America's foremost democratic theorist has provided a major statement of the case for economic democracy, the application of democratic principles to the governance of economic enterprises. Robert A. Dahl is often associated with empirical political science and interest group pluralism, but his normative commitment to democratic principles was evident in his well-known *A Preface to Democratic Theory* and is echoed in the title and content of this work. Moreover, the specific concern with workplace democracy has been an abiding theme throughout his professional life, from his early writings on workers' control and the British Labor Party, through his provocative *After the Revolution?*, to his Jefferson Lectures delivered in Berkeley, rewritten in this book, and published upon his retirement as the Sterling Professor of Political Science at Yale.

In the first chapter, Dahl asks with Tocqueville if equality is dangerous to liberty. As an empirical political scientist, he marshals facts to show that the transitions from democracy to au-

A PREFACE TO ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

Robert A. Dahl
California, \$14.95, 184 pp.

David P. Ellerman

thoritarianism (e.g., in Latin America) have hardly come from an excess of democratic equality.

Chapter Two begins to build the case for self-government in economic enterprises. Serious theory-building in this area is so new that there are major alternative conceptions of capitalism at stake. Dahl's view and an alternative viewpoint will be sketched here. Dahl sees a conflict between the right to self-government (in the political and economic spheres) and the right to property, particularly the "ownership of economic enterprises." He notes that the old liberal arguments for small-scale property as promoting freedom and equality, which might have been applicable in Mill's day, have by a curious metamorphosis been used to support modern corporate capitalism

with its obscene inequalities and corrupting influence on the political democratic process. The Fortune 500 are not 500 family farms.

With the property argument for corporate capitalism rendered a non sequitur in Chapter Two, Dahl presents several normative arguments for economic democracy in the remaining three chapters. Dahl gives little weight to the argument that workplace democracy will build democratic character and increase political participation. The empirical evidence is mixed partly because the ownership structures have been so ambiguous (e.g., the plywood co-ops). Moreover, expecting isolated experiments in workplace democracy to quickly alter democratic attitudes in the midst of modern American society is akin to promoting music appreciation by playing Mozart in the middle of a Manhattan traffic jam. It would be hard to hear the music, but by no fault of Mozart.

In Chapter Three, Dahl considers several alternative forms of worker ownership: traditional worker co-ops like the plywood co-ops, worker capitalist

schemes like the conventional ESOPs (Employee Stock Ownership Plans), Yugoslav-type social property firms, and Mondragon-type worker co-ops with cooperative ownership and individual equity accounts. While he encourages pragmatism in transitional mechanisms, Dahl's favored goal is a decentralized economy of self-governing cooperative enterprises modeled after the highly successful Mondragon cooperatives.

Chapter Four presents the main case, a non-utilitarian, rights-based argument that the right to democratic self-government extends directly to the economic enterprise and overshadows the feeble attempts to extend traditional property arguments to the modern corporation.

Chapter Five rounds out the discussion. Dahl properly ridicules those who think it is important to classify self-governing enterprises using the traditional dichotomy of "capitalism or socialism." He mentions the problem of democratic leadership in self-governing firms but notes that the problem is clearly shared with political democracy. And finally, he comments on several short-term transitional methods such as government assistance to the conversion of bellwether firms in key industries or beefed-up versions of the Scandinavian plans to democratically restructure major firms.

There is an alternative way for democratic theory to conceptually analyze capitalist production which nevertheless arrives at the same conclusions. What is the legal basis for the authority of capitalists or their managers over the employees in a capitalist firm? Does the lineage run to property or to contract? Dahl takes the standard property-view that the capitalists' authority runs to property. As a monarch might rule by virtue of ultimate ownership of the land, so the capitalists or their agents govern production by virtue of their "ownership of economic enterprises." But this is not the only way to look at things.

The alternative contract-view points out that, by itself, the ownership of corporations is only the *indirect* ownership of capital. The determination of who governs production is determined by the

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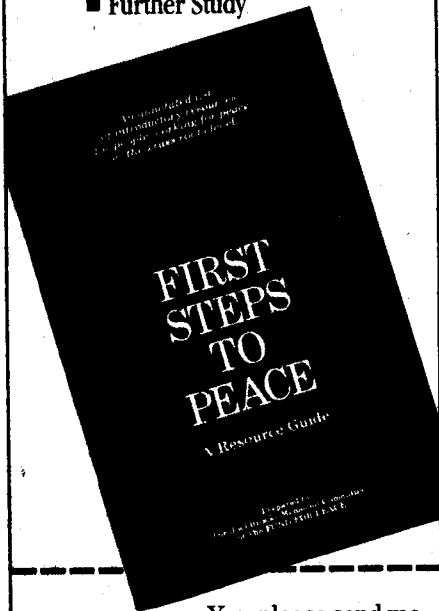
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structure of contracts, by whether the owners of capital hire labor or labor hires capital. If a corporation's capital assets are hired out rather than labor being hired in, then in no straightforward way do the owners of the corporation govern the production process using their assets. Hiring out assets means that the legal authority to govern production derives from contract, not property.

In capitalist production, the manager's legal authority over workers is based on the contract to hire or rent those workers, the employer-employee contract. Capital ownership is important but in an indirect manner; the market power of capital insures that capital hires labor rather than vice-versa. The standard property-view short-circuits this fact pattern. It mistakenly imputes the authority to govern production directly to capital ownership, and neglects the employment contract.

On the alternative contract-view,

Dahl's attack on property is misdirected. Property is not abused by being rented. The question is whether people are thus abused. The legal keystone of capitalism is not the alleged property right to govern production, but the contract for the renting of human beings, the employment contract. Nor should this terrain be unfamiliar to democratic theory. The employment contract is the economic nine-to-five version of the political *pactum subjectionis* used by old liberal theorists to ground non-democratic government in contract. For economic democracy, as for political democracy, the objection to subjection lies in the Enlightenment natural law doctrine which holds that people are endowed with "certain inalienable rights." Among these rights is the right of democratic self-government, a right unabridged and inalienable by consent or by contract. That too is Dahl's conclusion.

Young Turkestan

THE MORROW ANTHOLOGY OF YOUNGER AMERICAN POETS

Edited by Dave Smith
and David Bottoms

Morrow, \$17.95, 784 pp.

Paul West

ON FIRST looking into these realms of gold, I had an idea of the kind of poet I wanted to find: a *rara avis*, profound, fluent, articulate; a poet in the line of Wallace Stevens, tuned to the finest pitch of lexical precision; someone holistic and original, and above all unafraid of using the full orchestra of language. In other words, an able-bodied visionary with a spell so palpable that the rest of the world falls away.

Diane Ackerman is such a poet, at once a lyrical and metaphysical virtuoso, the first name in the anthology. Michael Blumenthal is such a poet too, though he aims at a suaver splendor than she, and so is Albert Goldbarth, although more caustic, more of an annotator than these two. Alfred Corn, Rodney Jones, Heather McHugh, Sandra McPherson, Robert Morgan, and Pattiann Rogers complete

my list, extorting from the reader exactly the kind of attention they need, opening up the world to a degree unknown and unimaginable to some of the others, whose poetic passion in some instances extends only as far as naming lunchcounters, intersections, and neighborhood streets.

The editors too back away from splendor, oratory; magniloquence, selecting even from the poets named above hardly their most radiant work, which is a pity. You have to know these poets already to get the just measure of their weight and dominance, and to see how accurately or not the samples evince them. The chimera suggests itself of a generational portrait based on poets' least characteristic poems, as if to prove (in this instance) that the younger poets, all born since 1940, are just plain, down-home folks. The forceful anthologist can always lead you astray and the only thing that saves you, and the poets, is the incentive an anthology gives you to go from a few poems to a poet's books, and to do this for some two dozen poets. In a way anthologies assume spurious power, exercising a synecdoche