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PEASM Winter '04 - Bohmer, Hahn & Vavrus

Book Response
Tabb – *The Amoral Elephant*.

Globalism as an expansion of paternalism

12 “Corporate public relations efforts distinguish between such 'understandable emotional responses' and what they represent as the reality: these changes are good for us, even if change is always unsettling.”

This public relations rhetoric seems to express a kind of paternalism toward labor and the general public. There's the implied statement that the corporations know better and that the public is less capable of making informed choices about what's really good for them than the elite. That the corporations are expressing paternalism is one possibility, but another is that they feign paternalism. It could be that while even the corporate officers believe they are acting within good moral economic paternal relationships, that the corporation itself acts without morals toward those social obligations and duties. In a way, the corporate structure absolves the individuals of responsibility for moral considerations, much like the ideas of an invisible hand in Smith or an electronic herd in Friedman provide a faceless amorphous alibi to excuse personal behaviour and culpability for decisions. Another important point is that there's a vicious cycle where the public relations functions as the tool that both claims paternalistic authority for the corporate system, but also withholds information that the public would use to make informed decisions. Thus, the public relations and marketing accelerate the very effect of the public appearing to be disabled of autonomy.

The pot calling the kettle redistributive

19 “The cost of unfettered growth produces the social movement for its control. Capitalism is a system of redistributive growth. The dynamic of social change derives from its very nature.”

One of the levied criticisms against the Democratic party and the Socialist or Communist movements is that they are all redistributive. Here then is the point that all these systems are redistributive, but distribute wealth differently. The accusations that Socialism, etc ... are all about redistribution of wealth fail, perhaps conveniently, to recognize that Capitalism itself

is also. Thus, the “redistributive” criticism is really from those with wealth resisting a different distribution, not distribution itself. There's a similarity here to the way that corporations and management decry collective bargaining, but are in fact the representatives of shareholders and capitalists and are collectively bargaining with labor. There's a strong disconnect at work here which seems to serve to distract not only the labor and social opposition, but the executives as well.

But even further, one of the key effects of the redistribution under the capitalist system is that communities are dismantled and destroyed. This unfettered pursuit of profit unfetters people from the social and emotional bonds to other people. This disassociation is a process that supports the dehumanization of others and an alienation of oneself from oneself, one's place in history and society. A side effect of this loss of community is the disabling of mechanisms of resistance and the “institutional” memory of previous conflicts within communities. The effect of this is much like the memory hole in Orwell.

Works Cited

Friedman, Thomas L. *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. 2000, Anchor
Tabb, William K. *The Amoral Elephant*. 2001, Monthly Review.
Orwell, George. 1984. 1990, Signet.