

# A true radical speaks about the dangers of our carnivorous, self-consuming capitalist system

Michael Parenti is one of the foremost political thinkers of our day and days past. Among mainstream brain waves others may have a higher profile. He's been cast aside, banished to the fringe of thoughts by their more powerful megaphones. Those in power prefer other more palatable outsiders. People with bark, but not bite.

Parenti is not that. He is described aptly as "more readably than Norm Chomsky and more serious than Michael Moore." In a way this is true, but even more telling is that he has grasp on the power structures that surround and entangle us. His most recent book, *Contrary Notions*, is a reader which spans his whole body of work. It is a good place to start if unfamiliar with his work.

His phrase "Simple facts are radical acts" struck me in a way that many writers and progressive thinkers do not. It is not a mantra, not a bumpersticker, but clear and true. The facts are there. The United States government is open about its bloodlust, its killing of innocents and its invasion of countless countries.

His concepts are not vague, but concrete. He speaks plainly and loudly for all to hear. His ideas are that by looking at the facts, you are committing a radical act. By looking at the facts of our government or gluttonous capital machine, we can see its danger and its inflicted harm. We see through the propaganda and see the truth.

His numerous books, articles and lectures touch a broad range of topics each with the hope of illuminating the hypocrisies that underpin our society and alienate everyone from each other.

One of his major points in recent years is the apolitization of youth culture. Which is a sense is that the media, the corporations who own them, and the government who governs us, do not want us involved. Do not want us engaged and want us set out to pasture, blindly following our leaders, continuing to buy materials along the way.

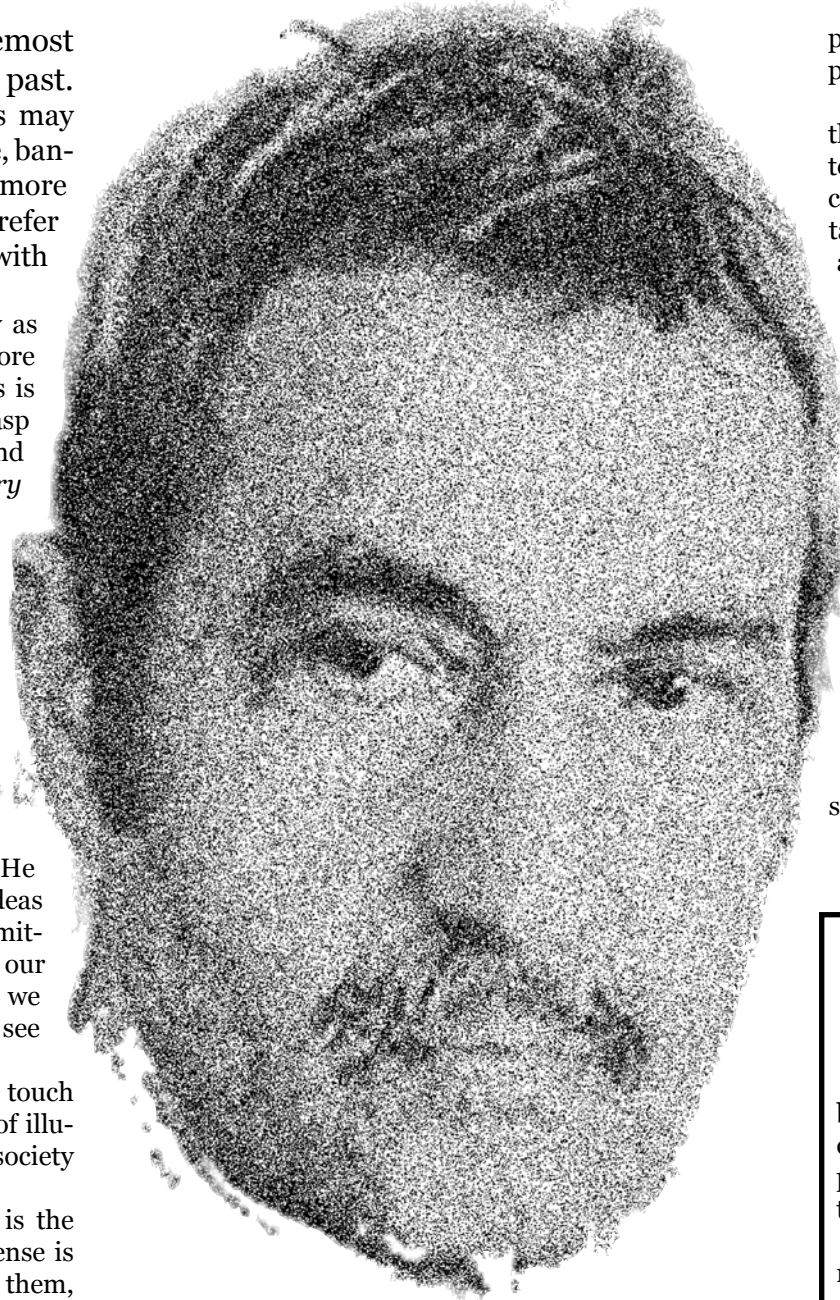
Parenti took few minutes on a recent afternoon to speak with me regarding two important issues I saw. One being the upcoming election, pitting a so-called agent of change against a stark regressive. The other being the mass media's dilution of youth culture and action. Both are connected. You only need to hear the media's throwing about the sports analogy (Barack's won 8 states in a row! Or McCain is now leading by 4 points) to understand this. The lowest common denominator not only denigrates politics, it nullifies response by those most apt to change, the youth!

**The Red Telephone: In wake of global events, do you see an awakening among youth and youth culture toward politics or is it just becoming another part of the media clutter?**

**Michael Parenti:** The anti-war demonstrations are heavily populated by young people, a range of ages young to old. That is a good sign. In addition, to what their worth, the crowds that gathered for this or that presidential candidate showed enthusiasm for primary campaigns that I don't feel too enthusiastic about. Maybe there is hope.

**RT: Is there a limit to how far mass media can stop political thought among youth culture?**

**Parenti:** We musn't underestimate the ability of the mass culture to replicate the conditions of their own hegemony. I mean they do put a lot of fluff and puffery and a lot of the apolitical programs. But all shows have a kind of political content. They are sexist, militaristic, super patriotic. They over-emphasize individualistic competitiveness. Young people facing this or that. There is not a trace of cooperative work or accomplishment among people.



**We musn't underestimate the ability of the mass culture to replicate the conditions of their own hegemony.**

It is all contests and individual egos. Those things are seemingly not political, but they are implicit political values which serve a high consumption, individualized, patternized capitalized society.

**RT: This election has been cast as a year of change. Do you see it as worrisome that people are putting too much trust in a candidate, such as Obama?**

**Parenti:** I think they don't know very much about Obama's position on fair trade, federal reserve and the some of the more esoteric, but very powerful issues in regard to the political economy. What we are getting are these ideas of change. He does have a policy that is less reactionary than McCain. His tax positions are less regressive. McCain is a militant extension and continuation of Bush's reactionary-ism. In that sense, Obama offers a limited improvement.

**RT: So is the whole left of the political spectrum cut off from mainstream politics? Are there any left politicians out there or is the Democratic party purely a center or center-right party?**

**Parenti:** I think both of those are true. There are members of the Democratic party such as the Black Caucus and Progressive Caucus who do put forth a distinctively progressive position such as people like Dennis Kucinich who are really pushing class issues on be-half of working families instead of the increasing consolidation of wealth among the top 1%. At the same time, the Democratic Party as a whole com-

position is really nothing more than a right centrist party.

But, the Democratic Party does do something that the Republicans don't. The function of the state is to defend and advance the interests of capital accumulation, that is to keep the capitalist system intact. But there is a second function that nobody talks about, including Marxists.

That function is to keep capitalism from devouring itself. Like any parasite, it will eat away at the body polity and in itself perish. Capitalism is a self-consuming system. We saw this in Argentina as capitalists start plundering their own money streams. We saw that with the subprime mortgages here, we saw that with Enron, Halliburton and WorldCom. A prosperous capitalist corporation was plundered by its leaders. The difference between Democratic Party and the Republican Party is that the Democrats do recognize the second function is to protect capitalism from itself, its worst predators.



## What the RNC Meant to Me.

Brian Swenson~the Minneapolis Correspondent

As a Minneapolis citizen, I was told there would be a lot of GOP party folk crowding the streets and drinking late into the evening. Certain bars (\$\$\$ paying), could stay open until 4 A.M.~just like those other convention places.

Things were going to get festive, parties, parades, concerts by popular entertainers. Fun for everyone.

The commander in Chief RNC attendees, G.Bush~D.Cheney+Co. were no shows to the party, thus depriving thousands of protestors of a valid object for their concerns and dissent. The hurricane was Bush + Co's convenient excuse to divert attention away from themselves, and stay out of the media glare.

I too stayed out of the crowds, even though I planned on attending the "Take Back Labor Day" concert, ( Billy Bragg, Steve Earle, Tom Morello, Atmosphere, Mos Def, + Pharcyde ) however the holiday was a day spent battling the worst case of food poisoning in recent memory. ( Two kinds of fried chicken, and some homemade mayonnaise in the potato salad, gently marinated in the sun ). When the intense vomiting subsided, I was able to focus on what was going on around me.

The city of St. Paul had no motorized traffic around the Xcel Center, forcing everyone to walk or bike around downtown. St. Paul wanted to make everything controllable and "safe" for the visitors, and they did with the help of hundreds of extra cops trying to out macho each other by beating up peace sign waving protestors.

In Minneapolis things got a little noisy after the RATM show at Target Center. Post RATM, a group tried takin' it to the streets only to be routed out of the warehouse district and corralled into a grid a few blocks away from the concert site. Anyone who was in or near that group was arrested by a large contingency of police, it was a 3:1 ratio of police to arrested individuals. No mercy~for everyone.

One day after, ( Sept. 5, 2008 ), a person could drive 50 mph ( 20 mph over the limit ) down Kellogg Blvd, without a cop in sight, and find a great parking spot in front of Ramsey Co. Gov't Center. The only outside signs of post convention reality, were two t~shirt vendors trying to sell whatever they had to the small groups piling into vans leaving the Crowne Plaza Hotel, down the street from the RNC. St. Paul quickly returned to being quiet.