

Comments on an article

by Phillip W. Weiss

The theme of the article, “Birds Leave Nest Involuntarily, and Oakland Fumes,” June 2, 2014,¹ is partly the hypocrisy of the protesters who seem more concerned about the welfare of five birds than in the plight of the homeless or of the hapless worker who has now become a scapegoat. Yet, although the story seems absurd, it has far more serious cultural and political implications. It calls attention to the significance of animals in contemporary society and of the political power of several organized groups – including major industries that have a vested economic interest in promoting the welfare and importance of animals to humans, such as pet store industry, zoological gardens, the movie industry, the animal food industry, conservation advocates, and animals' rights organizations – to shape public debate and their willingness to use their economic and political clout to ensure that their opinions are heard at the highest governmental levels and their interests protected.

A Marxist interpretation of this story could be thus: two social classes in conflict: one, the bourgeoisie, represented by the liberal propertied elements, and the other the proletariat, represented by the tree-pruner. For the former, the destruction of the birds' nest represents an encroachment on their economic turf by said tree-pruner who is a symbol of all the members of the proletariat in the community who could not care less about the birds, not because they're anti-bird per se but because they cannot afford such indulgences, and, by the way, are also being marginalized as the community undergoes gentrification. Thus the community is becoming increasingly polarized along class lines, as the middle class further shrinks and wealth becomes increasingly concentrated in a smaller percentage of the population, the bourgeoisie, which now possess and control the economic resources necessary to set the political agenda which shapes the future development of the community. The proletariat itself is fragmented, as each worker is looking out for himself in a marketplace in which decent paying jobs are becoming increasingly scarce. As a result, wages are being driven down while profits skyrocket. The wealth being generated is phenomenal, indeed unprecedented, yet the economy is out of balance as deficits soar. It is only a matter of time before the bubble bursts, and when that happens, the bourgeoisie will disappear, the proletariat will take power, a classless society will emerge, and the welfare of five baby birds won't mean spit.

For the romantic, the destruction of the birds' nest could be perceived as a wanton desecration of nature and the loss of a source for spiritual inspiration.

A poem:

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/03/us/after-fall-ruffled-feathers-for-5-birds-and-oakland.html? r=0>

Five Birds

There were five birds
In yonder tree,
So fine, so fair,
Their chirps brought glee.

Then came that man
With a pruning shear,
To cut and hack,
'Twas a sight to fear.

The little birds
Were in distress,
And so were we,
'Twas such a mess.

But then from places
Far away,
Came shouts so loud
That joined the fray.

The voices, firm,
Spoke with one mind,
"Retract your tool
And do be kind.

"For yonder birds,
Nature's fine gift,
Must not be touched
Or risk a rift.

"For we will fight,
And fight with glee,
To defend those birds
And will never flee.

"So away with you,
Back to your lair,
Offend no more
The birds so fair."