

# THE DAY AFTER THE LAST ELECTIONS

*for Pablo Neruda*

Four more years doing time in the Big House  
of the Amerikan Corporation,  
Bossman Presidente holding the rifle and the dogs...

There's a new sheriff in town—  
identical, in fact, to the old sheriff,  
resurrected in a fresh slogan  
from the Boot Hill of legal banditry  
and duded up in the erewhon drag of intolerance.

Here he comes,  
riding over the cries of the Innocents  
with an Old Testament fury—  
a rootin', tootin', six-gun totin' bottomliner,  
with a duty to the Stockholders  
to make the world safe for Apocalypse.

Yes, the People have spoken—  
but in their sleep, hind legs kicking  
like Ol' Shep chasing dreamrabbits  
through 3rd, 4th and 5th world alleys.  
The nation is still apologizing to Custer  
for having Unions—

meanwhile: the eyes of Saint Elvis float  
above billboards advertising the cola  
that leads to the method of true smiling.

Waiters jostle with sharks and orchids.

While nobody was watching,  
while nobody was listening,  
while everybody was ordering another round  
of blood on the rocks,  
they changed the monkey again—

deja vu, with amnesia, one more time.

## A NOTE ON THE POEMS

The great American poet, Thomas McGrath, famously wrote about two kinds of political poetry: *Tactical* and *Strategic*. Of course, there are many kinds of political poetry and as many approaches to it as there are poets. McGrath's intent in this regard was to do nothing more than rough out two broad classifications that might be useful to poets who brought a political sensibility to Poetry. McGrath's own words on this subject are available in various interviews he gave over the years, including a video interview I conducted in 1982, and I encourage those interested to seek them out.

For the most part, this collection represents what might be considered the *Tactical* aspect of political poetry. *Tactical* poems can be thought of as a Practical Poesy or, to their detractors, propaganda. They seek to point out injustice and inequality and raise class consciousness while tending toward overt militancy and calls to action. It is often that call to action, based on class politics, that academics in America have found so distasteful. The poems in this collection fall most clearly and deliberately into the kind of agitprop that political poetry is often accused of being.

The time arc of these poems runs from the late 1970s into the George W. Bush years in the White House and its naked corporate coup. There are those who would find many of these poems, especially the earlier ones, naive in their hopes and bravado, and perhaps they would be right. In the late 1970s I was a determined young anti-establishment Lefty, full of gung-ho enthusiasm and, when *Red* meant the political opposite of what it does today, before it became co-opted by reactionaries, wore my very red heart on my sleeve.

I am an old man now and, although decades have passed since my first political poems, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

At no other time since the Great Depression of the 1930's have so many people become acutely aware that Capitalism has failed and betrayed them, and by its very nature will always do so. We are still engaged in a historical struggle about what is to be the destiny of the overwhelming majority of the human race. Will we continue to pull the immense wagons of a tiny minority of elites, never choosing the road or the burden? Or will we collectively build an all-inclusive civilization that serves the needs of the many against the sociopathic desires of the few, that greens the Earth and reaches for the stars? As I write this, a new Dark Age looms—but the light of hope is a hard thing to extinguish, and beautiful dreams feed that light.

The dedications on these poems are meant to acknowledge people whose work I admire and in some cases has influenced my own. Some of them are my poetic ancestors, some of them are my contemporaries, and others are people whose words, ideas and actions I find powerful and important. I think of them as my tribe, even though there may be those among them who do not share that outlook. The dedications comprise only an incomplete list—any book would have to be much, much larger to be truly inclusive. There are many poets around the world who have given much of their talents (and even lives) to resisting empire, and more coming up all the time. These young poets standing on the horizon deserve our support and encouragement. As we know, the best poems are yet to be written.

Robert Edwards  
Kirkland, Washington  
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*Acknowledgements*

# AMERICAN MEDIA

*for Erich Fried*

Some say  $2 + 2 = 4$

while others say

$2 + 2 = 5$ .

Others still beat their fists on tables and declare

that  $2 + 2 = 22$ .

We, as objective journalists,

are here to make sure

that all sides are equally heard.