

# MINNIE BRUCE PRATT

## *The Poet vs. the Profiteers*

BY JOY PARKS



Poet Minnie Bruce Pratt whose sixth book of poetry is a journey through and beyond capitalism, is seen here at a Syracuse University protest of Morgan Chase's CEO as a commencement speaker. (Photo: Leslie Fineberg)

Essayist, theorist and poet Minnie Bruce Pratt has written extensively on feminist, lesbian and transgender issues in North America for more than 20 years. Her sixth book of poetry, *Inside the Money Machine*, is a journey through and beyond capitalism in the 21st century.

**HERIZONS:** *Many of the poems in Inside the Money Machine deal with issues and situations that could have been taken from yesterday's newspaper. Did you consciously set out to write about the effects of the economic situation?*

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT: That reflects the cycle of boom and bust that has recurred under capitalism. I was very conscious of this as I wrote the poems. I started working on them seriously in the late '90s after I started to study economics and read the *Communist Manifesto*. I discovered how beautiful was the language of [Karl] Marx and [Frederick] Engels. If the economists can write poetry, what would happen if the poet tried to write their economics?

*Do you still believe poetry is a viable political tool?*

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT: I think poetry is the verbal art form best suited to this age. Written poetry condenses thought, sensuality and physicality, images, sound and energy into a compact, quickly accessed communication that can have tremendous intellectual and emotional impacts. We poets can post our poems in cyberspace, bypassing the gatekeepers of literature and going directly to people leading their everyday lives.

*What's different about being a working poet in 2011, as compared to 1981, when The Sound of One Fork was released?*

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT: In 1981, I would send my lesbian poems off to mainstream literary journals and get back curt little rejection notes: "These are not for us!" As lesbians we had to create not only our literature, but the magazines, newspapers and publishing houses to publish our work, the distribution systems, the bookstores.

When I worked as part of the collective that published *Feminary* [subtitled *A Feminist Journal for the South, Emphasizing Lesbian Visions*], printers often refused to print material produced by feminists and lesbians even though we were paying them!

*Many of the poems you've written in the past have been about lives that happen outside the mainstream. The poems in Inside the Money Machine deal with these issues as well, but they feel broader, larger in scope. What's different about living inside/outside the mainstream in America today?*

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT: I think that the crisis in capitalism has called the question of who the "mainstream" is. The last 30 years—and more if we go back to the organizing of Black communities in the 1950s U.S. South—have been about fighting to expand the public space, and public acknowledgement, for people who have been excluded in the U.S., not just from "citizenship," but also from the very definition of humanity. My struggle as a lesbian mother—who lost custody of my children simply because of my love for other women—was part of that fight. The working people of the U.S. have gained crucial lessons in solidarity with each other from the struggles of the last half century.

Now the scaffolding of capitalism stands starkly clear to more people, as banks and corporations reap record profits and regular working people have their homes foreclosed and can't get work. Money for health care and education is siphoned off to fund multiple U.S. wars waged to make the world secure for corporate investment!

In this context, the mainstream is the 99 percent of us who work for a living and have only our ability to labour to support us and our families. The "broadening" of the scope in my poems reflects these broadening connections. I am a poet writing from inside this mainstream—the stream of working people who create the wealth of the world, and who can create a future in which we live.

*What happens now? Where do we go from here?*

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT: People are already answering your question as they occupy hundreds of cities. All over, these occupations of resistance are becoming rallying points for those who now feel they have nothing to lose. I was writing this world in the poems of *Inside the Money Machine*. Now I see the poems leaping off the pages into the cities of this country.

A longer version of interview is at [www.herizons.ca](http://www.herizons.ca). Herizons' review of *Inside the Money Machine* is on page 45. The book is available at [www.carolinavrenpress.org](http://www.carolinavrenpress.org).

