

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2004 \$2

Relay

A Socialist
Project
Review



INTERVIEW WITH PETER CAMEJO * ONTARIO LIBERALS
EMPIRE & THE MEDIA * UPDATE ON VENEZUELA

An Interview With Peter Camejo:

Vice Presidential Candidate on the Ralph Nader/Peter Camejo 2004 ticket in the United States Presidential Elections



"It's like a kind of psychological trauma that is happening in our society."

Ernest Tate, on behalf of Relay, interviews to Peter Camejo, who speaks about various left groups that support his campaign and are addressing some of the internal difficulties in the Green Party. Tate has known Camejo since the late 1950's, when Camejo was a leader of the Young Socialists Alliance and a leader of the American Socialist

Worker's Party. In the 1960s, Camejo gained national prominence because of his work against the Vietnam War at the beginning of a profound youth radicalization which later swept America and Canada. He is now a leader of the Green Party in California and has emerged as a major figure on the American left. He ran in the last state election for governor in which Arnold Schwarzenegger was elected. He is on the Ralph Nader ticket as Vice Presidential candidate in the coming

November elections.

Tate: This morning's National Post says Ralph Nader has been ruled off the ballot in Florida. In your "Avocado Declaration,"* you predicted these kinds of tactics being used against you.

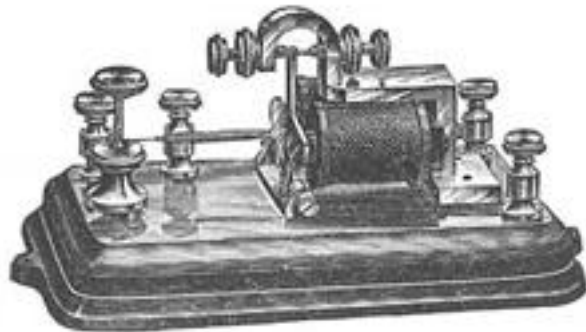
Peter Camejo: Well, in the case of Florida, it's a judge who has simply taken it upon himself to declare that the Reform Party is not legitimate. This is unheard of. It's really untenable. In other words, even if a party has ballot status, they can just rule it off. This has never happened before to a party that has ballot status. So we're appealing the decision in the court system. The Reform Party's national convention came out against the war in Iraq and against the Patriot Act - for these reasons they've endorsed Ralph Nader. Once a large party, but now not so large, it still has ballot status

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About Socialist Project

At a meeting in Toronto in the fall of 2000, some 750 activists responded to a call to "rebuild the left" by developing a structured movement against capitalism. This call for a new political formation that would be "more than a movement, less than a party" was similar to other initiatives in Canada and around the world that have been undertaken as the traditional organizations of the political left have waned.

The call was based on the understanding that the discovery and creation of a new kind of left politics is not going to be easy. It was in this spirit that, when the first Toronto initiative faltered, a group of independent socialists continued to meet with other activists across Ontario to try learn from the experience and find a way forward. The group asked hard questions about how radically different from that first initiative a new political formation of the left would need to be. They exchanged ideas and assessments of the political situation in Canada and the world, both to focus debate and to arrive at areas of political agreement. Out of this process, the Socialist Project was launched as a new political formation of the Canadian left.



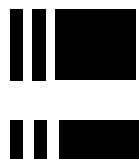
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RELAY



Relay, A Socialist Project Review, intends to act as a forum for conveying and debating current issues of importance to the Left in Ontario, Canada and from around the world. Contributions to the re-laying of the foundations for a viable socialist politics are welcomed by the editorial committee.

October / November

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American Imperialism: The Illusions of Interimperial Rivalry

By Leo Panitch

The use of the term 'empire' or even 'imperialism' to characterize the current American role in the world has suddenly become almost commonplace. And as with the first use of the term in the late 1870s - when it was used by British writers and administrators who wanted to strengthen and expand Britain's colonial empire - so it is being used by many today to advocate and/or justify the reinforcement and spread of the American empire.

This empire is an informal one: in fact it initially spread though the decolonization of the old formal empires. For a long time the face of American empire was obscured by this. As the great Canadian political economist, Harold Innis, said in 1948, 'American imperialism has been made plausible and attractive by its insistence that it is non-imperialistic'. But this only helped to make it a far more powerful empire than the old informal European and Japanese empires that it has succeeded, and indeed increasingly incorporated.

With the collapse of the USSR, the Russian empire was also increasingly incorporated into the informal American one. And moreover, with the removal of the Cold-War danger that direct US military interventions in states outside the American hemisphere would lead to nuclear Armageddon, liberal human rights advocates were led to call on the US to act as a surrogate international police power. It was hardly surprising in this context that more cynical and less naïve strategists of American global rule, and their academic and media 'hired prizefighters' began to drop the imperial veil and speak the language of a new white

man's burden.

The 'loneliness of power' was increasingly involved here. The felt burden of ultimate responsibility (and since 9/11 the much greater sensitivity to US vulnerability as a target of terrorism at home as well as abroad) promoted both the hubris and sense of burden that came with the now evident unique power of the American state. This led it to question further whether even the limited compromises it had to make in operating through multilateral institutions - so that American imperialism was concealed - were unnecessarily constraining its strategic options. This is what underlies the increasingly unconcealed nature of American imperialism today.

For all its justified outrage at the shameless actions of the imperial state today, there is some unmistakable signs of 'I-told-you-so' gratification on the Left at the ubiquity of the discourse of imperialism today. The concept of imperialism has always been especially important to the Left, as much for its emotive and mobilizing qualities as for its analytic ones. The common use of the term today obviously makes its use for the former purposes easier. And the lack in the mainstream usage of any serious political economy or pattern of historical determination that would explain the emergence and reproduction of today's American empire, and the dimensions of structural oppression



and exploitation pertaining to it, serves as a poignant reminder of why it was Marxism that made the analytic running in theorizing imperialism for most of the 20th century.

Yet, for that very reason, there is a danger that the Left will inappropriately insist on trying to make 21st century American imperialism fit the categories classical Marxist developed to analyze the very different situation a century ago. This is reflected in the interpretations of the war on Iraq as determined by the attempt to spatially displace an economic crisis of over-accumulation, and the presentation of the disagreements among the leading capitalist states over the war in Iraq as evidence of inter-imperial rivalry. With the end of the American boom of the 1990s, and the growing US trade and fiscal deficit, left-wing accounts of US military actions in terms of compensating for American economic decline amidst renewed inter-imperial rivalry have become as commonplace as 'new white man's burden' justification for imperialism on the center and right.

The evidence offered to sustain this is remarkably short-term and economic. Its as though the cooperation among all the NATO states in the war on Yugoslavia only few short years ago is forgotten, not to mention their cooperation through the 1990s in the economic embargo on and bombing of Iraq. Also forgotten seems to be the remarkable strength the US economy has shown relative to the European and Japanese economies in the era of neoliberalism, not to mention the relative shallowness of the recession that followed the end of the boom compared to earlier recessions. This is not to say that the current economic conjuncture does not reveal genuine problems for every state in global capitalism, including the American. But these reflect new contradictions that global neoliberalism has generated in all state, including the synchronization of recessions, the threat of deflation,

the dependence of the world on American markets and the dependence of the United States on capital inflows to cover its trade deficit.



What is clear, or at least should be, is that we cannot understand imperialism today in terms of economic crises giving rise to inter-imperial rivalry. The extent of the theoretically unselfconscious use of the term 'rivalry' to label the economic competition between the EU, Japan/East Asia and the United States is remarkable. The distinctive meaning the concept had in the pre-World War I context, when economic competition among European states was indeed imbricated with comparable military capacities and Lenin could assert that 'imperialist wars are absolutely inevitable', is clearly lacking in the contemporary context of overwhelming American military dominance. But beyond this, the meaning it had in the past is contradicted by the distinctive economic as well as military integration that exists between the leading capitalist powers today.

The term 'rivalry' inflates economic competition between states far beyond what it signifies in the real world. In many respects, the other leading capitalist states have been 'Canadianized' in terms of their place

in the American empire. While China may perhaps emerge eventually as a pole of inter-imperial power, it will obviously be very far from reaching such a status for a good many decades. The fact that certain elements in the American state are concerned to ensure that its 'unipolar' power today is used to prevent the possible emergence of imperial rivals tomorrow can hardly be used as evidence that such rivals already exist.

None of this means, of course, that state and economic structures have become homogeneous or that there is no divergence in many policy areas, or that contradiction and conflict are absent from the imperial order. But these contradictions and conflicts are located not so much in the relationships between the advanced capitalist states, as *within* these states, as they try to manage their internal processes of accumulation, legitimation and class struggle.

To the extent that there is a crisis of American imperialism today, it arises in relation to the states outside the capitalist core. Where these states are – as in much of the third world and the former Soviet bloc – relatively undeveloped capitalist states, yet increasingly located within the orbit of global capital, the international financial institutions, as well as the core capitalist states acting either in concert or on their own, have intervened to impose neoliberal structural 'reforms.' All too often these interventions have aggravated rather than solved the problem because of the abstract universalism of the remedy. Whatever neoliberalism's alleged successes in relation to strengthening an already developed capitalist economy, it increasingly appears as a misguided strategy for capitalist development itself.

As for so-called 'rogue states' – those which are not within the orbit of global capitalism so that neither penetrating external economic forces nor international →

institutions can effectively restructure them – direct unilateral intervention on the part of the American state has become increasingly tempting. It is this that has brought the term 'empire' back into mainstream currency, and it is fraught with all kinds of unpredictable ramifications. The trouble for the American empire, as it inclines in this strategic direction, is that very few of the world's states today - given their social forces and economic and political structures - are going to be able to be reconstructed along the lines of post-war Japan and Germany, even if - indeed especially if - they are occupied by the US military, and even if they are penetrated rather than marginalized by globalization.

The disagreements over the war on Iraq between France, Germany and even Canada, on the one hand, and the American state, on the other, need to be seen in this light. These tensions pertain very little to economic rivalries. Indeed their bourgeoisies - visibly troubled by and increasingly complaining about not being on the same page as the Americans - are even less inclined to challenge American hegemony than they were in the 1970s. The tensions pertain rather more to an inclination on the part of these states themselves (in good part reflective of their relative lack of autonomous military capacity) to prefer the use of multilateral institutions given their subordinate status in the American empire.

The European leaders are above all pragmatists when it comes to playing power politics, and what they mainly want is a voice in Wash-

ington D.C. They would like to think that they will be at least be listened when they have something to propose, even if they know that it will be the Americans who will dispose. The Green German foreign minister, Joscha Fischer, told Jan Kavan, the Czech President of the UN General Assembly during the run-up to the invasion of Iraq (they were old friends from the days when they were student dissidents against their respective regimes) that he was anxious to quickly put the disagreements over the war out of the way. When Kavan asked why, Fischer gave a straightforward answer: 'Because it is better to be inside than outside Caesar's court.'

It was this kind of pragmatic calculation that so quickly led Canada to sign on to Star Wars missile defense shield as compensation to the Americans for not sending troops to Iraq. And it was the same calculation that led those European states that had opposed giving UN imprimatur to the Anglo-British invasion of Iraq to vote at the UN a year later to legitimate the occupation and the puppet Allawi government.



The real problem for American imperialism today lies not with the ruling classes of the European and Japanese states own imperialist inclinations. On the contrary, it is the danger posed to these states' legitimacy once they are located in a framework of American imperialism that is so visibly imperialistic. The American state's occupation of Iraq

- precisely because it so flagrantly imperial and is so openly connected to a doctrine that expresses the broader purposes of establishing neoliberal capitalist order on a global scale - has evoked an unprecedented popular revulsion against American imperialism, including opposition within the capitalist core states. Managing this is not easy for the vassal states that are usually called America's partners and allies.

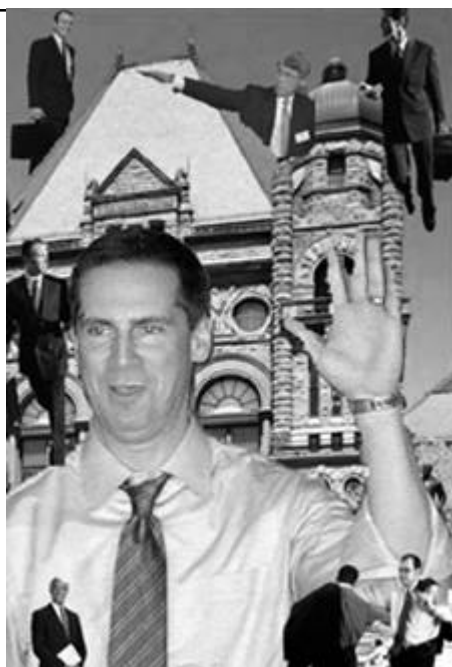
This is especially significant because since the American empire can only rule through other states, the greatest danger to it is that the states and ruling classes within its orbit will be rendered illegitimate by virtue of their articulation to the imperium. But such is their degree of integration with the imperium that they are unable to break with it. Only a fundamental change in class and structure within each of these states can bring about a disarticulation from the empire.

A Kerry victory in November might indeed make the empire look more multilateralist, but this will hardly address the underlying problem. The unconcealed nature of the American imperium would be made all the clearer under another four years of Bush, but would be concealed again under Kerry. Rather than a replay of the interimperial rivalry that led the most of working classes of the old empires to line up behind their ruling classes in World War One, the political space may well be opening up for the kind of mobilization from below that point towards the fundamental class transformations that are necessary in all the capitalist states to finally bring an end to capitalist imperialism. ■



Neoliberalism & the Liberals: McGuinty One Year Later

By Bryan Evans



There is an old expression – it doesn't matter who you vote for, the government always wins! If we unpack this expression what it really says is that real power is located only in part in the apparatus of central government. So where does political power really call home and how does this contribute to continuity? To paraphrase Marx, the Whig and the Tory accuse each other of awful crimes but each ensures that exploitation based on ownership of property is never addressed.

The 2003 election was characterized by many pundits as a 'watershed' election equal in historical weight to that of 1943 which was pivotal to the construction of the post-war order in Ontario. They were wrong and wrong for good reason. The McGuinty government is different from what it replaced but there is also continuity. The question is: what is the foundation for this continuity? In a word – neoliberalism. This paradigm of ideas, agents and policies is what links Dalton McGuinty to Harris and to Rae.

We need to begin by framing what neoliberalism is and is not. For many who voted for or hoped for a change in October 2003 there has been widespread disappointment with the McGuinty government. Un-

derlying this is a very mistaken view that neoliberalism in Ontario is simply a set of ideas which were adopted by wrong-headed or morally deficient political actors who began their conquest in 1995 and somehow it ended in October 2003. Ideas do matter but they emerge from a larger context. The Tory days were simply a particularly aggressive variant of a policy paradigm which has many subtleties based on historical factors and location.

A key objective of neoliberalism is to narrow the range of political and economic policy choices of those in power. Certainly there are subtle and nuanced differences, but never any rupture with the 'marketization of everything' premise of neoliberalism. That is parties whether social democratic, centrist or conservative simply manage neoliberal constructs in different ways.

What neoliberalism is is a particular form of class rule. It developed out of an important shift in the balance of class forces and the defeat of the Left, including in particular social democracy which began in the 1970's and became an unqualified rout in the 1990's. The post war compromises, which were embodied in whatever version of the welfare state

you wish to look at, became the target of a class struggle waged from above. The agents of neoliberal change understood how to employ the state to transform the economy and its political arrangements. In one country after another neoliberalism consolidated through trade and capital liberalization, privatization, wage rollbacks, public sector shrinkage, deregulation, attacks on trade union freedoms, and a downsizing of the social wage – that is all of the mechanisms which were used to socialize and distribute risk – unemployment insurance, health care, social assistance, public pensions. The result is that we in Ontario have since the 1970's entered into a period of political realignment and political instability, which directly reflects the tidal shift which has occurred in the economy.

The private sector restructuring of the 1980's transformed the economic foundation of the old bargains and in the 1990's that same restructuring entered the public sector. Neoliberalism has become another word for widening insecurity.

There are three critical dimensions working to create the neoliberal foundation.

Competitive austerity: that is hyper-competitive conditions within and between states has created a profit crisis. The only way profits can be reflat is by holding income growth and public expenditures down while pursuing an aggressive accumulation strategy built largely around exports and , in the financial sector, speculation.

The ruling bloc: the postwar period was constructed by a "national bourgeoisie" located in and benefiting from nationally bounded investment and production and who were willing and able to manufacture a range of compromises with trade unions, social democrats, and others, all of which contributed to national political and economic development. Under neoliberalism →

this ruling bloc has been transformed. The new ruling alliance is increasingly dependent upon an aggressive export strategy the logic of which requires the forementioned competitive austerity.

The state: neoliberalism operates through the institutions of the state - its not the invisible hand or laissez faire or inevitable. It takes state power to remove rigidities and barriers whether these are defined as high taxes, environmental regulations, or trade unions (Gregory Albo, "Neoliberalism, the State, and the Left: A Canadian Perspective", *Monthly Review*, May 2002).

The essential Ontario Liberal theme was quantitatively different from that of the Tories. They argued for a reinvestment in public services and an end to tax cuts. But this was a difference of degree not of substance. At an ideological level we might think of it this way. From 1995 to 2003 the Tories pursued a "Two nations" or "two Ontario's" policy - a policy reminiscent of Thatchers' one third, two thirds strategy - explicitly centred on so-called wedge issues which served to split constituencies along public/private, working/unemployed, unionized/non-unionized, white/non-white lines. The conservative positions on taxation, labour law, education and equity were designed to tap into the broad sense of insecurity and hyper-competition which had become a norm of life by characterizing others as somehow being privileged and protected if not outright contributing to the decline of standards of living. Thus Kimberley Rogers can die for the crime of attempting to obtain an education while the Tory apparatchiks treated the public sector as if it were their private property.

The Liberals, for their part, in 2003 abandoned the Blue Lite platform of 1999 and adopted a One Nation theme with a communitarian flavour of 'we are all in this together'. Beyond the comforting, and one

must admit important, change in tone, they were not quite sure where to take all of us. And as they are finding out, they can't take all of us.

But at a qualitative level was there a difference or was this simply the plutocrats against the kleptocrats? The general wave of anti-Tory criticism was not informed by any understanding of class politics and of the state as an institution of class power or of any deeper understanding of how politics have changed in the neoliberal era. Under the Conservatives the Ontario state was a naked instrument of class power - there were no subtleties, no attempt to negotiate bargains and compromises - the very stuff, according to the Common Sense Revolutionaries, was responsible for "government being broke". In contrast, the Liberals argued for a different style of politics but not for a different substance. Let's just consider some details, which suggest greater rather than lesser continuity. While in opposition Liberal researchers cultivated substantial working relationships with Third Way advisors in Washington and London and they continue to exert influence on the policy thinking of the Government. And the Third Way movement seeks only a greater accommodation with neoliberal capitalism. But very consciously and deliberately does not seek to challenge the new orthodoxy.

Remember the Tory "whiz kids"? These were the ideologues - in fact the authors of the Common Sense Revolution. Guy Giorno was Mike Harris chief policy advisor, David Lindsay was his chief of staff, Leslie Noble was an outside advisor to the Premier. Where are they now? Well, they've all moved on to the world of consulting. Do you want to guess who some of their clients include?? How about the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Public Infrastructure. These same people who led the Revolution are still influencing, less directly, the shape of government policy. And we

routinely overlook the important role of the senior Public Service. Ee usually don't think about the upper echelons of the public service - they are invisible and unknown, but they have huge influence. What has changed since the early 1990's is the degree to which policy advisors and planners have become less concerned with rational planning - what works and what won't, but rather with political calculations. A former senior public servant said of the tory tax cuts "everyone in the Ministry of Finance knew these were not sustainable - but did they speak truth to power or just nod their heads in agreement in return for their performance pay?". What about corporate Ontario? In the 1999 election, Ontario's corporations donated nearly \$5 million to the Conservative party and \$1.2 million to the Liberals. In 2003 the Liberals secured nearly \$3 million in corporate donations and the Conservative corporate gravy train completely dried up not even breaking the \$2 million mark. Bay St. had changed its mind as to which horse to back.

McGuinty's electoral strategy in both 1999 and 2003 was to present himself and his party as being uncomfortable with the rough edges of the Common Sense Revolution, but not its basic substance.

Where does the Left Go?

Writing for the Toronto Star, James Laxer said: "McGuinty looks more like a potential premier who would enshrine the Harris Common Sense Revolution than one who would dismantle it" (Toronto Star, Dec. 9, 1996, p.A17). What this speaks to is that neoliberal power has 'moved in' and is now housed in the state. The Ontario Liberals are as intimately linked to the centres of corporate power as were the Conservatives. Their objective is to simply manage what exists differently. As a consequence a great deal of where we, the anti-capitalist Left, needs to be is largely outside of elec-

toral politics and engaged with broad popular front campaigns which reach across many boundaries but at the same time offer opportunities to challenge the basic logic of neoliberalism. Coalitions such as those confronting initiatives to privatize health, electricity, and infrastructure through public-private partnerships. These coalitions are spaces where the government can be challenged but, perhaps more importantly at this moment, where the Left can re-form itself as an organized opposition. This is precisely why the Ontario Needs a Raise Campaign is so critical. The ONR campaign raises issues and organizational potential for challenging the policy direction of the McGuinty government as it makes demands upon the state while being external to the state. The fundamental issue the ONR is built upon – that poverty is a widening and deepening reality – is a space where trade unions, low-

waged workers and the most marginalized might gather as a social bloc in their own autonomous right. This alone would be transformative for our movement.

According to one study about 37% of Canadian workers work as involuntary part time, short-term contract and full-time but untenured – meaning less than two years on the job. 53 % of Ontario workers earn \$15 per hour or less. The informalization of work combined with non-regulation (incapacity of the enforcement) has destroyed the post war mechanisms of social protection. The concrete demands for a living wage provides a foundation to at least argue and organize against an expanding economic horror. We need to remember neoliberalism is not an accident. It flows directly from the previous thirty years of transformation. Goods jobs have given way to bad jobs which gives away to no jobs. For the most part, while the

growing insecurity is felt, it is not understood. It has to a large degree been depoliticized as in there is no alternative to the market.

Changing parties will not change these underlying conditions. Recent Ontario polls have the NDP at traditional level of support – about 25% . However, voting for the NDP will not change the fundamental and qualitative transformation which has occurred in the economy and consequently the distribution of political power. Neoliberalism flows from the logic of capital as it stands and social democracy is not able or even willing to challenge this. When it is said and done, this struggle we are engaged in is not about the whigs and the Tories or the social democrats of whatever type, it is about capitalism. They are merely actors on its stage, directed by the stage managers. Progressive transformation will only be possible when we construct our own theatre. ■

Million Worker March By Matt Fodor & Samantha Fodor

American union members from coast to coast are mobilizing for what may be a turning point in labor's approach to politics. On **October 17**, union members and labor activists will convene in Washington, DC for the Million Worker March (MWM) to voice their demands.

The idea for the MWM was initiated by the militant Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) in Oakland. The MWM has been endorsed by unions representing millions of workers, including the entire ILWU Longshore Division, the National Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Teamsters National Black Caucus, the National Education Association, and the South Carolina and California state AFL-CIO federations.

The American working class is arguably facing its worst situa-

tion since the Great Depression. Less than 10 percent of private sector workers now unionized and close to 2 million jobs have been lost since George W. Bush entered office. Yet the Democrats - with their support for welfare reform, imperialist wars abroad and "free trade" agreements - have been just as complicit as Republicans in the vicious assault on workers. The recognition of the need for independent, working class politics in the U.S. is one of the reasons this mobilization is so important.

Despite the support of much of the labor movement, the AFL-CIO leadership has refused to endorse the MWM, and instead insists on using its vast resources to supporting John Kerry, the reactionary Democrat. Yet the election of Kerry would do little or nothing to meet the demands of this rank-and-file movement. ■

Some of the 22 demands include:

- Universal health care
- A national living wage
- Protection and enhancement of Social Security
- The cancellation of NAFTA, MAI and FTAA
- An end to privatization, contracting out and deregulation
- Amnesty for all undocumented workers
- Extend democracy to our economic structure
- Repeal of the Patriot Act



By Stephen
McBride

The Canadian government is in a self-congratulatory mood and engaged in an uncritical celebration of NAFTA's 10th birthday. According to the government the trade and investment agreement is a "resounding success." Closer analysis reveals that the government's case is threadbare at best. Few concrete benefits can be attributed to NAFTA and there have been significant costs.

Trade looms large in official enthusiasm for NAFTA. Indeed, Canada's trade with the US has increased and we are more dependent today that single market for both exports and imports than we were before NAFTA. However, while increased exports may be good news it does not follow that NAFTA is responsible. The US economy boomed in the 1990s and sucked in imports from around the world, NAFTA and non-NAFTA countries alike. Canadian exports were further boosted by a depreciating exchange rate between our dollar and the \$US.

Moreover, as a recent Statistics Canada showed the percentage of Canada's GDP which consists of exports to the US (36 per cent in 1999) ignores the extent to which exported good contain imported inputs from the US. Once this adjustment is made it seems only 22-23 per cent of our GDP is accounted for by exports to the US – still significant, and arguably healthier than the higher figure would be, but something of a cold shower for NAFTA enthusiasts.

Moreover, on a number of indicators our real economic performance is worse since NAFTA than it was before. As labour economists Andrew Jackson (Canadian Labour Congress) and Jim Stanford (CAW) have shown, economic growth is slower after NAFTA than before, and the productivity gap, relative to the US, remains and may have worsened. We remain overly dependent on resources and resource based manufactures and the transition to high technology and a knowledge based economy has proved still-born.

Meanwhile, Canadian social programmes have been undermined. This is not directly due to NAFTA, though we hear arguments from right wing ideologues justifying a "race to the bottom" on the spurious grounds that we cannot afford more generous social provision than that of our economic competitors. But the attack on social programmes is more the result of home-grown neoliberal policies that the result of external pressures. Be that as it may, the NAFTA era is one of rising inequality in Canada and a declining role for government which now accounts for little more by way of spending as a percentage of GDP than its counterpart in the US (though we still spend relatively more on income support measures than they do and less on the military).

NAFTA has other costs that are less easy to quantify but nonetheless real – such as NAFTA's impact on Canadian sovereignty and

the implications this has for democracy. Trade agreements like NAFTA have constitutional effect , though without having gone through any democratic constitutional amendment process. Canada suffers from a democratic deficit. And NAFTA contributes to that in a number of ways.

Canadian courts have lost jurisdiction as NAFTA places many important matters beyond their reach. Governments, too, have lost effective control in some areas. A form of property rights has been conferred on foreign investors through NAFTA Chapter 11 which gives them, for certain purposes, equal status with states.

Although studies suggest considerable autonomy remains at the nation-state level, often more than is used, there is no doubt that agreements like NAFTA "condition" and undermine the control formerly exercised by national authorities. States' ability to legislate on health, safety and the environment, to structure a desired mix of public and private, or domestic and foreign provision in the service sector, and to attach performance requirements to investment and thus pursue some forms of national economic strategy have all been limited by the agreements. Canada's use of energy resources as a policy instrument is circumscribed by NAFTA . For neoliberal ideologues losing sovereignty to restrict state intervention may be desirable. But for citizens who wants to keep future options open and look to governments to control markets and corporations, it prevents the future exercise of political and democratic choice in an important area.

NAFTA's balance sheet hardly justifies the Canadian government's uncritical celebration. Its economic benefits have been marginal at best and real costs have been imposed in areas of political and democratic control. A re-assessment is long overdue. ■

Who's Afraid of Venezuelan Democracy?

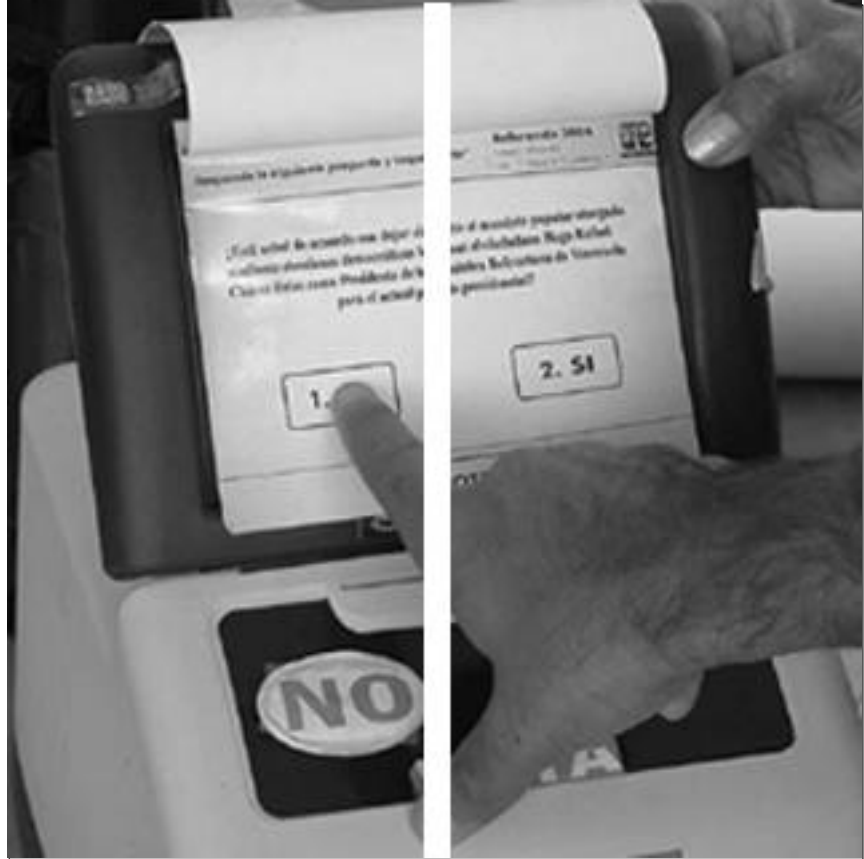
Implications of the Referendum

By *Nicolas Lopez*

According to the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, half-way through the period of an elected President and after collecting the signatures of 20% of the people who voted when the President was elected, a Referendum may be called to remove the President from power. After a very disputed and controversial collection of signatures conducted by US supported SUMATE for a splintered opposition coalition, the National Electoral Council decided that a recall Referendum would be called for President Hugo Rafael Chavez Frias. On August 15th, 2004 Venezuelans flowed by the millions to voting stations and patiently waited for hours before they could vote YES to remove President Chávez or NO if they wanted him to stay. Nine million people cast ballots, of which 60% rejected the option of removing their leader.

Ever since he was elected in 1998, Chávez has faced the opposition of a minority of mostly wealthy Venezuelans who have tried to forcefully remove him from office. In April 2002 the opposition attempted a coup which failed, and in December 2002/January 2003 sabotaged the State owned petroleum company, Petroleos de Venezuela (PdVsa). However, the democratically elected government managed to recover from dire economic conditions resulting from the damage done to its main source of wealth. PdVsa is now safely controlled by the Venezuelan State and funds the social programs that are providing millions of citizens with basic rights that they had been denied during decades.

These social programs are precisely what has been the priority of the Chávez Government during the last three years. This has an-



gered the privileged and powerful because these programs aim at building popular sovereignty, in other words, transferring the power to the citizens, without exclusions, a truly democratic measure as means to achieve social justice.

Greater investment in education, health care, housing and other measures that the government has taken to improve the living conditions of the most disadvantaged Venezuelans has earned Chávez the loyalty of millions of citizens. Nevertheless, the model of democracy introduced by the 1999 Constitution not only provides citizens with the right to remove or confirm an elected official but in fact, as Article 67 suggests, introduces mechanisms that transfer power from an over-

bureaucratized state to the organized communities. The community representative (mayors, governors) may not make important decisions unilaterally and must have approval from his/her community. This is not only a useful way to empower the population but also helps to reduce corruption by taking power away from the parasites of the revolution, replacing it with a more horizontal decision-making structure. The state, of course, must be involved in the process of decentralization of power through self-restructuring. It should direct the transition toward a socialist economy by integrating it into a new engineering of the productive economy, which it may only achieve if it upgrades its →

potential through the education of the population and low interest credit support to small and medium cooperative initiatives.

On the other hand, the neo-liberal opposition in Venezuela hasn't been democratic in its practices. Through the use of mass media, they have tried to create a false image of Chávez, hoping to accomplish a negative public opinion of the President. There's been evidence that the CIA participated in some of these attempts to destabilize the country and remove Chávez, using all kinds of tricks (usually fraud or violence) to create an environment of destabilization, much like it did in Chile in 1973. It is feared that a defeated, divided and desperate opposition will try anything to stop Chavez.

Earlier in the year hundreds of Colombian paramilitaries were found in the rural property of a Venezuelan nationalized Cuban named Alonso, not too far from Caracas. In September 17th, 2004 a group of workers from PdVsa was ambushed and killed in the Apure region.

The Venezuelan Defense Minister General Garcia Carneiro said

this was done by Colombian paramilitaries, while in Bogota the Defense Minister claimed that FARC-EP was responsible. These are just two examples of the depth of this conflict and the impacts of Plan Colombia through the presence of the USSouthCom and thousands of mercenaries. It seems as if a rather confused and crazed opposition to Chavez would opt to give away our sovereignty in a river of bloodshed before seeing the oppressed enjoy the basic rights that were denied to them for so long.

The Venezuelan Government has declared war on poverty, ignorance, disease, racism, militarism and neoliberal economic

policies, which have brought the country to the very difficult situation it found itself in when Chávez was elected in 1998. The Bolivarian Government has been able to withstand its rabid and resentful opposition only due to its model of participatory democracy that has promoted popular organization among aboriginal Venezuelans, peasants, workers, women, students, intellectuals, the middle class, cooperatives and the Bolivarian Circles.

For the August 15th Referendum the UBEs (Units of Electoral Battles) were created to mobilize the population. Along with the Electoral Patrols, which will now become Social Patrols, they functioned as communicational vehicles between the Government and the base. Their



success has allowed President Chavez to remain in power for at least 3 more years. The will of the people and their trust for their leader are a clear sign that the Bolivarian process of change is solid and growing in Venezuela and Latin America. This Revolutionary project is the essence of a strategy for peace, unity, dignity and happiness for the people of the continent, aiming at regional integration that may be reached only through a model of democracy that allows citizens more say in important government decisions and a more direct involvement in the solution of the problems that affect their lives. ■

On September 21, Vancouver and District Labour Council adopted the resolution below:

Solidarity With Venezuela

WHEREAS the Chavez Government in Venezuela was elected in 1998 with 56% of the vote; and,

WHEREAS the legitimacy of this government has been reaffirmed by the recent national referendum; and,

WHEREAS the Oligarchy in Venezuela has repeatedly attempted to undermine the Government by means of attempted coup, sabotage of Venezuela's oil industry, capital strike and recall campaigns; now,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Vancouver & District Labour Council give its full support to the progressive trade unions and social movements in Venezuela who support the reform program of the Chavez government by:

- 1) developing effective links with the progressive trade unions and social movements in Venezuela;
- 2) facilitating an exchange program between these organizations and the Canadian labour movement;
- 3) Organizing an official Canadian delegation to the April, 2005 Solidarity Conference in Caracas;
- 4) Sending this resolution to the BC Federation of Labour and CLC Conventions.

A New U.S. Military Base for Okinawa?

Only a flicker of fighting as Okinawa may yet succumb to another US Military base

by nchamah miller*

At the southernmost tip of that archipelago of islands we know as Japan lay the islands of Okinawa. These islands have a unique history, once their natives had their own language (the young generations no longer speak it), and their culture and traditions flourished during the independent Ryukyu kingdom; distinctly, throughout its annals many on the islands have resisted the political ambitions of the Government located on the mainland island of Japan. During World War II, Okinawa was the site of the only land battle fought on Japanese soil in which 2/3rds of its casualties were Okinawan's and 1/3 from other Japanese Islands. Much of the fighting forces were located in caves made throughout the island in which women, children and men hid, as many as 1,000 persons, per cave, were reduced to living in these conditions and of course many did not survive.

The dynamics of politics between the Okinawese and mainland Japan have not changed to any great extent from what they were during the Ryukyu independence era: today the US military bases located on Okinawa fuel the differences between them. There are forty-five US military facilities that occupy 11% of the territory of Okinawa, representing 25% of US bases in Japan, with approximately 30,000 military personnel; the largest being the Kadena

Air Base also the largest US air force base in Asia. Alleging security concerns, the US military complex, completely controls and designates the air corridors and air space in Japan such that in Okinawa the corridor for civilian aircraft is only 10 miles wide. The new force of friction comes from the Government of Japan's agreement to build another far more expanded airbase to replace the Futenma base at a location on Henoko despite the protest vote from of residents of the island.

Okinawa is also the site of the most spectacularly rich near-shore coral reefs. Henoko, the proposed site of the new air base, is located in the northern part of mainland Okinawa, graced by a treasure trove of rich sea beds where the dugongs, designated one of Japan's endangered species (sea cows related to the manatees) come to feed. Both



the US and Japanese governments are planning to destroy the corals and sea grasses with their plans to build an off-shore military base measuring 2500 m. long and 730 m. wide; justifications for the plan reside in the argument that the Henoko base will replace the now out-dated Futenma base. However, as Dr. Etuko Urashima stated to me, "the idea of filling in the coral reefs for this military airbase construction plan is really a very old one, already proposed by the US military in 1966. Coincidentally, the Japanese government cited information from the 1966 study that proposed the Henoko location. Indeed doesn't this situation seem to be part of a long-range American plan?"

A Chronology of Major Developments in the Henoko struggle:

1996 Japanese government and US agree to move Futenma airbase and the US designs the plans for Henoko

1997 A majority of votes are cast in Okinawa at Nago City against the construction of the airbase

2000 The world Conservation Union adopts a resolution for the preservation of the dugong. The US tables a report declaring the dugong an endangered species.

2004 The Japanese Government tries using force to begin drilling surveys. A sit-in protest by local residents is organized and is successful in delaying the surveys. The protest continues even at the time of this writing. Among the protesters is the honourable Oba San 92 year old who said, "I have raised my children from the gifts of this sea. It is our mission to pass this treasure to our offspring." ■

*The author visited this site in July 2004.



David Mandel's 'Labour After Communism'

Russian Labour Still Reeling from
Capitalist Shock Therapy

Reviewed by John Riddell



The collapse of the Russian economy in the early 1990s, brought on by marketization sponsored by the rich capitalist states, plunged the Russian labour movement into the Dark Ages. Since then, little information has been available on the conditions and struggles of Russian workers.

David Mandel's *Labour After Communism* breaks the silence. Co-founder of the School for Workers Democracy, which conducts rank-and-file labour education in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, Mandel shares his unrivaled knowledge of the union movement in these countries, drawing on innumerable discussions

with workers and worker activists.

Shock Therapy

Mandel shows us a Russian working class as devastated by economic collapse and the fierce onslaught of bosses and government—a class still groping to find the path to an effective response.

The “shock therapy” applied in Russia after 1991 led not to a capitalist flowering but to a social catastrophe whose depth and duration is without parallel in any industrialized society. Mandel marshals the key statistics: industrial production down 55%, capital investment down 80%,

research and development down 90%.

Only the resource sector has been integrated into the world market, he notes. Elsewhere, investment is practically nil and the human capital necessary to revive industry has been dispersed.

During the last few years, Russia has experienced a slow economic recovery, but Mandel questions whether it is sustainable.

Russia's present social order, vividly portrayed by Mandel, lacks the mainspring of a capitalist economy: profitable private investment in the production of goods and services. Instead, the Russian “bourgeoisie” is “essentially [a] rent-seeking class, intimately linked both to the corrupt state administration and to the criminal underworld.” Indeed, as the recent jailing of Khodorkovsky, the oil baron, demonstrates, “in Russia, the state appoints the millionaires and billionaires.”

The scale of personal wealth is greater, but otherwise, all this is reminiscent of the Stalin-to-Brezhnev era. So too is Mandel's statement that “to workers, the new bourgeoisie is not a class of wealth-

Art and the Sleeping Giant By Elaine Whittaker

If you go to Lakehead University's Faculty of Forestry and the Forest Environment website you learn that “the unusual rock formation that lends its name to Sleeping Giant Provincial Park is surrounded by legend. It is said to be the formation of the Ojibwa Indians' Great Spirit, Nanabijou, who had been turned to stone when the secret of a silver mine was discovered by white men.” And if you went to Thunder Bay this summer and visited Sleeping Giant Provincial Park on the July 15th weekend you would encounter one artist that chose to present an art piece that explored this secret,

Catherine Kozyra.

Catherine Kozyra is an installation artist and founding member of the artists' collective ‘In the Shadow of the Giant’. For one weekend this summer they presented their exhibition of outdoor site-specific art at Sleeping Giant Provincial Park. For her piece the history of Ontario's first silver mine was still very much alive if you stood on the dock of Silver Islet's General Store and looked over to a small outcropping of rock and vegetation jutting out of Lake Superior. It was here that nearly three million dollars in silver was extracted from beneath

the water from 1868-1884. A breakwall was constructed around the islet, filled with rock, enlarging the islet to seven times its original size, eventually holding a shaft house, boarding houses for the miners and even a small library. But by 1884 with the best silver ore having been excavated, and the constant repairs to the breakwall that was besieged by the force of Lake Superior, the mine was closed, and the islet was returned to the lake and nature. Still visible, just below the surface of the water, are the dark shapes of the mine shafts. Fascinated by the watery presence of these structures,

generating 'captains of industry' but a gang of rapacious pillager."

Mandel does not attempt to characterize Russian society today. But it appears that some of the barriers to capitalist restoration erected by Russia's 1917 October revolution have survived, even if in highly distorted form.

Labour's Decline

The economic collapse after 1991 shattered the labour activism of the final Soviet years. Suddenly workers faced mass unemployment, a 2/3rds fall in real wages, and a decline in living conditions so stark that male life expectancy decreased five years. Workers were hampered by the consciousness inherited from the Soviet era, which in Mandel's view was marked by submissiveness, cynicism, and "a weakly developed sense of dignity." Nor could they, during the years of "Neo-Liberalism" triumphant, draw inspiration from the example of labour upsurges in other countries. As a result, Mandel says, the work force is deeply demoralized.

Under these conditions, it is

not surprising that labour activism has followed a downward curve over the last 13 years. Nonetheless, Mandel argues that in factories where workers have found a way to fight back, they have won significant gains.

The same lesson can be drawn from his detailed discussion of conditions in Ukraine and Belarus. His Ukrainian examples show that the socialist consciousness of even isolated individual militants has a great impact. Belarus provides a "control," where shock therapy was not applied, the Soviet-era economy is still largely intact, and investment and production levels have been largely maintained.

Focusing on the auto industry, where international outreach by the Canadian Autoworkers provided him with a wealth of contacts and information, Mandel points out that militant workers in Russia have very rarely been able to utilize the structures of their official trade unions for resistance. These unions found it easy, in the early nineties, to transfer loyalty from the Communist Party to their factory administrations, and

function in most respects as company unions.

Mandel's vivid anecdotes show how the ideology of "social partnership" with the employers works its way through all levels of the union, eliminating it as a vehicle for shop-floor resistance. For the North American reader, this portrayal awakens a bitter reflection: In the weaker sectors of *our* labour movement, things are not much better. And even our strongest private sector unions see no alternative to going cap in hand to the government, asking for subsidies to the employers.

Yet there is a difference, and it is decisive. North American employers' offer of "social partnership" is patently insincere: they aim to be rid of the unions, and unions that wish to survive must find a way to resist. The Russian ruling elite, however, is too weak to do without its union prop, which has given "social partnership" a shabby stability.

Independent Unionism

Mandel draws hope →

Sleeping Giant Provincial Park In the Shadow of the Giant Artists' Collective July 15-18, 2--4

Catherine constructed a piece that mimicked these submerged shafts. Using two framed plexus panels that floated on the water's surface, they both calmed the water and reflected the sky. These haunting pieces remind us that the results of human intervention in resource extraction can be reclaimed by nature. But is this trace of a promising past now gone or of a foreboding future?

This was the third exhibit at Sleeping Giant Provincial Park by the collective. In total twelve artists presented installations throughout the park, each responding to the park's environment in their own

unique way. Dolores Maki's smoke-fired clay *Lodestones*, in tune with the natural surroundings, marked the trail along Perry Bay; and Renee Terpstra led visitors on a enticing promenade along the cliff lookouts while entrancing them with a performance that drew on surrealism, poetry and a new mythology of ecology. Along the Kabeyun Trail, tires cast from salt prodded out of the ground in Kelly Phillips' installation, *Salt Licks*, alerting us that animals drawn to the highways in search of salt are often endangering their lives; while in another part of the park David Karasiewicz's figures of metal

spoke to a future where the dependency on biotechnology and technology have left us with a disdain for nature and mortality.

The intent of installation art has always been to activate place and context, dissolving boundaries, fusing art with life. In ecological settings as startling as Sleeping Giant, the landscape intercedes in each installation at every turn. Where the art ends and the ecology begins blurs. And that is when the politics of what we are doing in our parks, and beyond, cannot be escaped. ■

from the survival, under the most difficult circumstances, of Russia's independent union movement, whose guiding principle is not social partnership but working-class independence.

Denied any legal rights or standing, constantly harassed by the bosses, official unions, and legal authorities, the independent unions have eked out an existence as minority currents made up of the boldest and most committed workers.

Mandel profiles one of the most successful of these ventures—Edinstvo (Unity), which counts about

3,000 members among the 100,000 workers in the world's largest auto factory, in Togliatti. Through difficult years it has known ups and downs. But it has been sustained, Mandel tells us, because "its members are convinced of a basic conflict of interests separating them, as workers, from management and they believe that they can defend themselves through independent organization."

The gains have been tangible: wages, for example, are twice as high in the Togliatti complex as in Russia's other major auto factory of this type.

Edinstvo and the other independent unions lack a vision of an alternative, socialist society. Nonetheless, Mandel sees in it a beacon of hope: "Edinstvo has a deeply committed leadership that lives and breathes union and that has refused to let the daily grind of union work stop it from thinking strategically." ■

David Mandel. Labour After Communism: Auto Workers and their Unions in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2004. 283 p. \$28.99.

Global Networks at the Art Gallery of Ontario

By Samantha Fodor

In his traveling exhibit, 'Global Networks,' Marc Lombardi has sketched out the links between governmental and corporate entities as they work together in a decentralized mode to control international capital through complex arrangements of high-level felonies and frauds. The show, which is on display at the Art Gallery of Ontario from September 10th to December 5th, includes 25 drawings completed between 1996 and 2000 that summarize some of the most significant fraudulent political and fiscal acts of the previous half-century.

Anyone can appreciate Lombardi's work without requiring any special skills for art-analysis. The informative is emphasized over the artistic beauty. Relationships and interactions are drafted with an intricate array various constellations of rings, spots, hyphens, texts and curved lines. Indeed, the often complex charts are sketched out in unpretentious graphite and colored pencil on various sizes of paper. Some of the subject matter that has been diagrammed includes the Iran Contra, S&L, Clinton/Jackson Stephens and the Iran-Gate frauds. The connections between such key

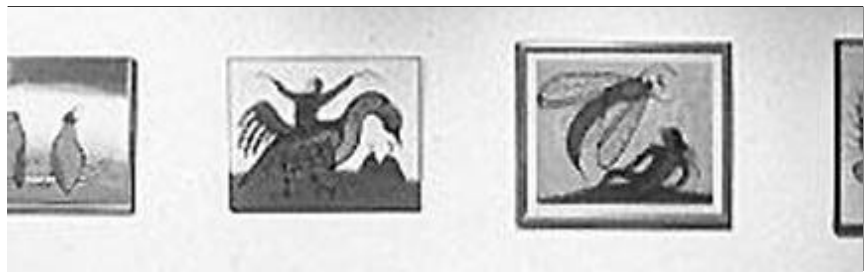
players as 1) Pat Robertson, Beurt Servaas and the UPI takeover, 2) the Chicago outfit and satellite regimes, as well as 3) the World Finance Corporation and Nugar-Hand Ltd. were all charted out. The diagram summarizing the relationship between George Bush, James Bath and Osama Bin Laden has in particular generated a great deal of attention.

Lombardi laboriously and meticulously researched all the subjects outlined in his artwork, extracting information from publicly accessible and mainstream sources including the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and Washington Post, when working as a librarian in Texas after getting his BA from the University of Syracuse. His information filled up a reported total of 14,000 flashcards. In 1997 Lombardi moved to New York City. It was here that he was found dead from an apparent suicide in 2000. Given the nature of his work, it seems quite fitting that Lombardi's death generated conspiracy theories in itself, especially as he reported being followed a few days before dying. In addition, both the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI were both interested in his work. ■

Regional Dilemmas?

Summer Exhibitions
Thunder Bay Art Gallery
June-September 2004

By Greg Albo



The searing geographical differentiation of Canada has always made the regional aesthetic a necessary but deeply problematic conception. The tendency has been to search for a mediated landscape art – from the geographical terrain to the emotive to the canvas – in so many variations of the imagined national sensibility. Or to cast the lot of the regional with the nostalgic and romantic, in the way of the social interpretatives of a Kurelek or a Lemieux, capturing a resoundingly place-specific moment. In the process of representing the particular and the local, the regional art gallery also gains legitimacy from the local wheels of commerce, and a claim on arts resources from neoliberal central governments for what can't be represented in the big galleries of the metropolises.

But hasn't capitalism also unified the aesthetic experience in the rapture of commodity exchange as it has spread and unified markets and made common the violence of its labour processes? Shouldn't we insist that cultural workers have the freedom to explore all that underlies the social forms of the regional? And isn't it time that we accounted for the human need for the production of art beyond the major salons of Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal into every corner of Canada? This is to suggest, as much against prevailing sentiments in the fashionable art arcades, that the local is necessarily implicated in the universal, that the region and the centre are produced in the very same processes.

The summer exhibitions at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery illustrate all these dilemmas of regional art policy in Canada. The modest gal-

lery is tucked into a corner of the Confederation College campus, literally bursting at the seams to accommodate its holdings and current shows. Its collections include numerous important works by Aboriginal artists such as Norval Morriseau, Jane Ash Poitras, Benjamin Chee Chee, and others, with only some of the many stunning and brash paintings of the Woodlands School of Northern Ontario able to be viewed. It is an astonishing statement on the backwardness of Canadian and Ontario arts policies that one of the greatest achievements of contemporary Canadian art is so inadequately housed. Nonetheless, the works drawn together in *Contemporary Aboriginal Art: Sacred Elements* from the permanent collection of the gallery illustrated well the burst of energy that has made contemporary Aboriginal art so vital. The juxtaposition of traditions of Northwest Coast masks with more contemporary works drawing striking continuities between time and place, while also, more often than not, pointing to what cannot be retrieved. Also exploring naturalist themes, Kathy Browning's *Spirit of the North* presented a number of stimulating digital prints, almost appearing layered by paint to get a depth of image, each exploring an abstract quality to the Superior landscape. And a third exhibition, *Reflections of Superior*, gathered some forty pieces of woodcuts, etchings, paintings, photo-based images, from artists around Lake Superior, based on images captured around a sail around the circumference of the lake. The exhibits all were worthwhile with more than a few accomplished pieces being presented, if with a decidedly

localist cast and limited engagement. But then at the margins of the Gallery another modestly-presented piece on the geography of Lake Superior, bursting out of the particulars of the region to explore contemporary dilemmas. Josephine Mandamin's *Waterwalk* recalls through photographs and story-telling her 1300 mile walk around Lake Superior, with other Anishinabe women, to raise awareness of ecological threats to water quality.

This, then, was exactly what was needed: something quite beyond the constraints of colour and form within the varied schools of Superior paintings and photographic imagery of nature as modernist abstraction; and something after endless postmodernist winks at cultural nostalgia and localized identities. A simple work saying so much from just confronting contemporary dilemmas rather than avoiding them. This is vital not just to the region and its particular aesthetic reflections, but Canadian culture as a whole. But why so little space given over to the breaking out of the bonds of the traditional?

At this point we need to take a step back and say something about the political economy of it all. The dilemma is not the exhibitions of regional geography or the mandates to develop and collect the regionally significant, and particularly the endlessly innovative work of contemporary Aboriginal art. Indeed, regional galleries do not have the space to adequately exhibit what should be shown in this vein. The problem lies in the shameful underfunding of arts as a whole, and the relative centralization of what is spent in a few centres. →

This really is, at the end of the day, the neglect of public gallery spaces for working class people and the general public (who will fill the galleries if the admission is free), as there is more than enough being spent by ruling elites on their own private collections to drive art market prices skyward. The pressures of neoliberal constraints on funding,

moreover, compel the 'big' galleries to pursue 'blockbuster' shows, with endless exhibits of impressionism that never seem to lack for audiences, and the 'regional' galleries to appeal to the parochialism of local business elites. To undertake a radical departure into shows of the untried or difficult is to threaten the wobbly financial basis to the whole

array of cultural institutions. The cultural practices supporting neoliberalism nestle everywhere and in unseen ways, and those that proffer a challenging brush stroke to the prevailing neoliberal order of capitalism are relegated to the margins. Isn't that also how the regional is always implicated in more universal processes and dilemmas? ■

Empire & the Media:

A Socialist Project Interview with Robert McChesney

On Wednesday August 4, 2004, Robert McChesney presented his argument in *The Problem of the US Media* to over 80 enthusiastic discussion participants at the Victory Café in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The day after McChesney's discussion at the Victory Café, Greg Albo (G. A.), Sam Gindin (S. G.), and Tanner Mirrlees (T. M.) caught up with McChesney to talk in greater detail about the American empire and the global media. An excerpt from the interview follows.

On American Empire, the American state, and Global Media Corporations

T. M. – Given the size and global 'competitive advantage' of American communicational and media firms over those in developing countries, and the American state's brandishing of the 'free-flow of information' doctrine to pry open new markets for American-based media commodities, to what extent is the problem of the U.S. media *a/so* the core problem of the global media?

R. M. – It is in two different ways. First, American media, communication, advertising play an important role in consolidation of the American imperial project, and the corporate globalization project. They have for quite some time. The late Herbert Schiller documented the role that

media and communication played in American dominance in the 1960s, and it is much greater today. Second, the American domination of the global news system results in journalist coverage that is often biased to American nationalism and foreign policy.

S. G. – Yet, CNN, a global news corporation, appeals to the audiences in other countries in localized ways. R. M. – Yes, I just returned from Norway and there is a striking difference between the European CNN and the American CNN. Nevertheless, the global media is an important part of the American imperial project, but as I argue in *The Problem of the US Media*, we are at a time when not only 'national' policies are being made but global media policies as well: intellectual property rights, internet regulations and control. These policies rest on global or transnational decisions. We need to build global alliances to work on these issues, because the decisions that are made at 'the global level' will shape the domestic situations of every national-state and its population.

T. M. – But if the American commercial media model is being globalized, and is said to represent the interests, values, and aspirations of the planet, would it not be more useful to argue that media reform has to start within

the imperial core of the global system, in the United States?

R. M. – I think you are right. In the early 1930s, when groups were trying to set up a non-commercial public broadcasting system in Canada, to justify this system, they referred to arguments made by Americans, which said: 'the commercial media system sucks, we don't want it anymore, the last thing you want is commercial radio running Canada.' Yes, we are Americans, we are at the heart of the global media problem, we can tell you how bad the commercial media system is. We have got to build up our part of the media reform movement within America, and connect with other like-minded movements around the world.

T. M. – Is there much research being done on the particular government institutions and communication apparatuses that currently represent, or function on behalf of, the foreign policy objectives of political blocs in positions of state power, like the Bush Administration?

R. M. - Well, there is always a subplot that is not openly discussed concerning the media and global trade. There is a movement in the WTO, for example, to make audio-visual media (film, television, and radio) subject to purely commercial prin-

principles, which means that capitalism rules the media, no regulation allowed. This position is rarely debated in the US. The US trade position is never fought internally, it is only fought externally; the public broadcasters and policy makers in Europe are against US media trade policy because they know it will kill their subsidies. We are trying to open the US front on these issues, we want to make it a domestic issue that audio-visual media is excluded from trade deals.

T. M. – Is the ideal policy response to the American free-market commercial media system by groups in different countries to establish protectionist trade policies at the national level? Protectionist efforts like that were made (and failed) in 1970s by national liberation movements in various post-colonial countries, often fostered through UNESCO and the principles of the MacBride Commission. Are we going back to that starting point, or is what you are proposing something different?

R. M. – I would like to think that it is something different. Since the 70s, with the emergence of new technologies, the great movement among progressives has been to establish grassroots and community media, as opposed to a centralized model. The economy lends itself to this kind of media. But at the same time, we can't just have community media in local villages and bars. We do need a national media and a transnational media, a heterogeneous media system. I don't think we are moving

backwards, we are going forward. We are making history.

S. G. – To what extent does the American state represent the interests of global media and communications corporations?

R. M. – The system produces the necessary outcomes, the confluence of factors and pressures often produce this outcome, without much prior planning. Most corporations have strong political ties to governments and lobby groups. The Ameri-

as the executive committee for representing, strengthening and managing the economic affairs of the whole global media bourgeoisie?

R – Yes

G. A. - Does UNESCO constitute an opposition to the political and economic ties between the American state and the global media?

R. M. – It should and could, but I need to learn more about this. That is where much opposition takes place, but it is very weak.

G. A. – UNESCO is one international institution that the American state doesn't entirely control.

S. G. – The amazingly direct way that the American state works on behalf of global communications and media corporations, has much to do with the structure of the communications industry.

R. M. – Yes, because all of these corporations depend on government licenses to be able to exist. All of the big media corporations depend on government granted



can state feels that the global media corporations are the official emissary of the overriding foreign policy objectives of the American state. So, for example, the American state will represent and work on behalf the economic interests of non-American communication and media corporations (Italy's Vivendi and News Corporation, for example). There is an economic and political overlap here, but it is not always direct.

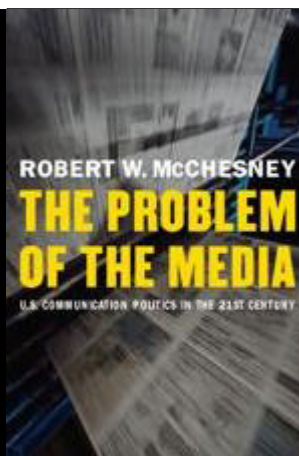
T. M. – So the American state acts

monopoly licenses. The irony is that the FCC claims to regulate these groups in the domestic interest of the American public, while internationally, the FCC acts as these global corporations chief lobbying force, representing their interests in foreign countries all over the world. It is not like these corporations send their lobbyists to Washington to talk about global trade! Their corporate operations are already in Washington, already built in to the American state. ■

A review of

McChesney, Robert. (2004). *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Tanner Mirrlees



That the major U.S. news media uncritically reproduced the Bush Administration's ideological rationale for the invasion and occupation of Iraq (Saddam has and is ready to deploy deadly 'weapons of mass destruction,' thus, we must defend our national security with a 'pre-emptive' strike; Saddam is a key political and financial backer of Osama Bin Laden's globe spanning Al-Qaeda terrorist network, is partially responsible for the 911 attacks, and thus, must be punished to maintain our "global security"; Saddam is a ruthless and tyrannical dictator that violates the basic human rights of his population, thus, we must attack Iraq on behalf of the collective interests of all Iraqis), is symptomatic of the failure of the major U.S. media to facilitate, let alone uphold, intelligent discussion and public debate. This is a massive problem, an affront to media democracy which Robert McChesney critiques and imagines solutions to in his latest book: *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication and Politics in the 21st Century*.

The argument for media democracy made by McChesney and other activists is straightforward. The mass-media is a vehicle for transmitting representations, narratives, and "ideas" that are central to the formation of our individual and collective consciousness, a medium through which we come to understand and imagine ourselves in relation to the world, and a primary source of information that we turn to

in order to gain knowledge of the world. As a supposedly "democratic" institution, the mass-media should thus be a function of and forum for the representation of a plurality of public voices, opinions, and interests. For "democracy" to work, then, for their to be a meaningful "public sphere," then we not only require, as media audiences, the circulation of a variety of different critical perspectives, beliefs and worldviews, but also, as media producers, a plurality of communicative mediums through which to disseminate our perspectives, beliefs, and worldviews.

But the corporate media system, argues McChesney, undermines, and even conspires against media democracy. How? A few rhetorical questions reflect the essence of McChesney's explanation: if the world's mass-media is owned and controlled by five massive corporations, that, like all for-profit enterprises, are dependent on advertising, driven by the basic economic imperative to compete and accumulate, and primarily interested in filling the pockets of their investors, can the mass-media reflect a diversity of non-commercialized interests, facilitate meaningful public dialogue, and encourage critical debate? If the ruling classes of gargantuan media corporations use well-financed lobby groups to push their interests through the representatives of dominant American political parties, which use the American state's media policy-makers to secure the individual and

private interests of these media elite, can the commercial mass-media and the so-called public institutions of media governance effectively represent the interests, tastes and values of the great majority of the world's people? And what if the media's ruling classes share the ideological worldview of the American state's dominant political parties —the neo-conservative Republicans for example—, can we expect this semi-partisan mass-media system to represent, with any consistency and credibility, the diversity of critical opinions, experiences, and perspectives of say, peace activists that are tired of the Bush's Administration's propaganda, workers whose jobs have been de-valued or outsourced as an effect of neo-liberal globalization, and left-leaning political groups that oppose American-style "free-market" capitalism? For McChesney, the answer to these questions is usually no.

But McChesney doesn't blame the problem of the US media on a grand "conspiracy" (though backroom deals between private media elite and public media policy makers is a substantial part of the problem). The problem of the US media is not natural, but economically and politically determined. The media, as a business driven and determined by the by the imperatives of the globalizing capitalist system itself, works to maximize the profits of a small group of owners by keeping production costs low while excluding the vast mass of citizens from the media policy-making process in the name of "efficiency." There is a radical discrepancy between what the mass-media ought to do and what the mass-media actually does, a rupture between the democratic "ideal" of the for-public mass-media and the "undemocratic" reality of the for-profit mass-media system. But to this argument, a critical reader may query: if the mass-media is so flawed, so centralized, and so undemocratic, then why don't American citizens, that supposedly

have an “interest” in preserving their beloved rights, freedoms and democracy, demand that the media be structurally reformed? McChesney implicitly answers these questions by exposing and debunking eight ideological myths about the nature, role, and function of the private mass-media system which generally function to uphold the ruling class interests of the media elite.

The intellectual representatives of the media elite purport to “reflect” reality — through reportage, sound bits, and new narratives—rather than to shape, influence, and construct “reality” in different ways. They state that the commercialized media system is a natural, even essential, component of American national identity, rather than something that was widely contested during its inception. They contend that media-policy makers have effectively responded to pre-given public values, interests and needs rather than using the discourse of “public” values, interests, and needs to serve the private values, interests, and needs of corporations. They argue that the for-profit news system provides the best quality of journalism and that the process and content of journalistic production is shaped by the code of ethical and moral professionalism rather than by the economic demands, pressures, and imperatives of their media corporation’s owners, advertisers, and consumer-hungry marketing specialists. In some instances, they report that the corporate news media is actually biased to a “Left-Wing” perspective, which not only reduces the idea of “Left-Wing” to the philosophical precedents of basic liberalism, but also, mystifies the blatant absence of real “Left-Wing” debate and critical dialogue about the pitfalls of the free-market, the global condition of workers, class inequality, racism, sexism, and socialist alternatives to these contradictions in even the most “liberal” mass-media.

The representatives of the media elite, as good free-market populists, concede that the corporate

media, due to its competitive for-profit imperatives, “gives the people what they really truly want and need” rather than seducing audiences with millions of commercial wants and needs for new commodities. They are technological determinists which argue that new technologies —the Internet for example—is a spontaneous product of the evolutionary tendencies of science and technology, rather than a historical product resulting from real economic interests and governmental policies. Finally, they believe that there is no alternative to the corporate media system, that all alternative modes of producing, reporting on, circulating, and consuming information, ideas, and knowledge, will ultimately fail; this last myth is a rhetorical tactic which neutralizes, even demonizes, the creative capacities and political struggles of people to imagine and implement a more democratized media system. These eight ideological myths about the media conceal, and in some instances, legitimize the undemocratic reality of the commercial media system while upholding the interests of its owners.



But as McChesney shows us, these myths dissolve when tested against empirical evidence. The conclusion of McChesney’s text gives us hope that “the end of media history” —the disappearance of critical dialogue about the future of the media and the organization of

widespread public consent to the absorption of the media by the “invisible hand” of the free-market—has not arrived. Although the ideological mythologies about the media are persuasive, widespread, and capable of marginalizing alternative viewpoints and public dissent, they are increasingly coming under widespread attack by citizens, social groups, and activists, from both Left and Right, that in different ways, are imagining and struggling for a new and democratic solution to the problem of the U.S. media. The “democratic solution” that McChesney and likeminded media activists are fighting for is “a well-funded, structurally pluralistic, and diverse non-profit and non-commercial media sector, as well as a more competitive and decentralized commercial sector”(2004: 11). This new democratic media system would not only involve citizens and social groups of all kinds in the development of communication and media policy, but also, and more importantly, liberate the sphere of ideas, knowledge, and information from the tentacles of corporate control.

McChesney’s book is an extremely well-researched, powerfully argued, and historically urgent call to arms for everyone that desires a more democratic media system; with hope and struggle, McChesney’s text will be cited years from now, as a seminal contribution to the study of critical media policy, and also, as a political text which criticized the problem of the US media and gave us the confidence to dismantle the capitalist media oligarchy. And this struggle to liberate the sphere of media and communication from corporate rule, the blasting open of the prism of commercial discourse, mind management, and consumer consciousness to new social horizons and possibilities, may be one small step in the struggle to develop a solution the many contradictions of capitalist imperialism. ■

Americas Social Forum:

Building Alternatives to Neoliberalism

By Carlos Torres

During the last ten days of July, a gathering of the people of the Americas took place in Quito. More than ten thousand people converged to participate in summits, conferences and forums, which discussed the most pressing and urgent issues affecting the peoples of the Americas. This event covered themes and topics relevant to politics, society and indigenous peoples.



For the first time in perhaps centuries a movement of organizations and ideas met to discuss and to debate their own issues in light of the current neoliberal trend that, on the one hand, dominates social and political and economic developments in the region as well as the method of countering it. This kind of transnational movement tended to agree on the reasons why poverty, alienation and exclusion occur in what we know as the Americas as a continent. The encounter brought together 700 representatives and participants in the II Continental Summit of the People and Indigenous Nations of Abya Yala (Americas), about 800 young people in the youth camp, and 814 social organizations in the first Social Forum of the Americas. The event was covered by 580 journalists and alternative media from all regions of the Americas. People from Europe, Africa and other regions also participated.

A reinvigorated movement is emerging in the Americas, although

I should say in Abya Yala, (Indigenous name for the Americas) which is much different than that of the anti-capitalist movement of the 70s and the 80s – it is unarmed and does not necessarily aim at taking power from the state. Yet, building power at the community realm and ‘invading’ domains of the traditional state seems to be the strategy of the ‘social and the indigenous left.’

The act of resisting neoliberalism and creating alternatives to it is sweeping across the hemisphere after another lost decade for the region. The novelty of this is that resistance is becoming more and more defiant to its main advocate, the USA, be this resistance in the form of open anti-imperialism or as a rejection to its economic treaties; the FTAA or the bundle of bilateral agreements with which the US is attempting to supersede the failed FTAA.

As the World Social Forum, the Americas Forum tends to follow the same statement of principles, which means that this is a territory of ideas, democratic, participatory, open to the exchange of ideas and experiences, networking, and so on. In this space “civil society” comes together; organizations from social movements, NGOs, and others. Civil society can be understood as social entities that are not part of the state power, the military, parliamentary system, or corporations. In this regard, through their relative independence from power structures, civil society can become a power itself. This idea is basically understood by an important sector of the indigenous community of the Americas, as well as the civil society described above. The challenge here is to understand where and how this civil society can develop ideas and practices beyond forums and sum-

mits. The question to be asked is how, if civil society is not seeking power at any level of state apparatus, does civil society build power in a region with the asymmetries that exist in the Americas?



In that regard it seems that the indigenous community has a more acute vision on what to do to create a dynamic that will link its own people geographically and nationally. While civil society still meets in democratic style at forums and summits, the truth is that there is not a motivational agent trying to stimulate the debate around matters such as networking, building national or regional platforms of demands, nor is there a way to contest power at any level in society. It seems that there is confusion in terms of choosing the terrain for the struggle. We cannot escape capitalism nor the state spaces in the struggle towards building alternatives to the existing system. The Americas Social Forum, very much in line the World Social Forum, tends to espouse the idea that small is beautiful, along with the Zapatista idea of not aspiring to state power at any level. Clearly, the state apparatus in most of these structures is still a battlefield, the national state has not disappeared, and yet the debate taking place in the social forums tends to remain in the informational and educational phase, neglecting to some extent the importance of actively encouraging

the debate on more strategic thinking.

In spite of this, the Americas Social Forum managed for the first time to bring together social entities from across the hemisphere, and we should not overlook this contribution since, from this event, important initiatives and campaigns can emerge, such as the “No to the FTAA” campaign or the anti-militarization campaign in the Americas, which in itself is important. Yet, the trade agreements pending on the peoples of the Americas are some of the worst threats to their well-being. Issues related to the “Another America is Possible” or how to get there, have not been explored in depth.

As Emmanuel Wallerstein has recently commented, “Although the idea of open space sounds interesting, after a period of time that becomes a little bit boring.” Even though talking about the same ideas is important for educational purposes and bringing people together creates commonalities and affinities in different dimensions, if the ASF cannot manage to bring the political and social mobilization to a more grounded state through which issues are actually confronted and dealt with people will detach themselves from the ASF because “there is nothing there for them.” In contrast to what has happened in other regions of the globe, in the Americas we have witnessed important processes of mobilization emerging from non-traditional partisan politics and social movement politics. These mobilizations are clearly focusing on neoliberal policies and as A. Borón asserts they, “are widely disseminated around the world, not having emerged from any political or social entity that is part of ‘the establishment.’” In 1994 the Zapatista movement, in 1984 the MST claim for land in Brazil, the Seattle rebellion in 1999, Quebec City in 2001, the mobilization and struggle of indigenous communities in the Andean countries and the southern cone – the ASF must learn from and absorb these kinds

of movements and organizations in order to become a counter-hegemonic social force to imperial and neoliberal interests in the region.

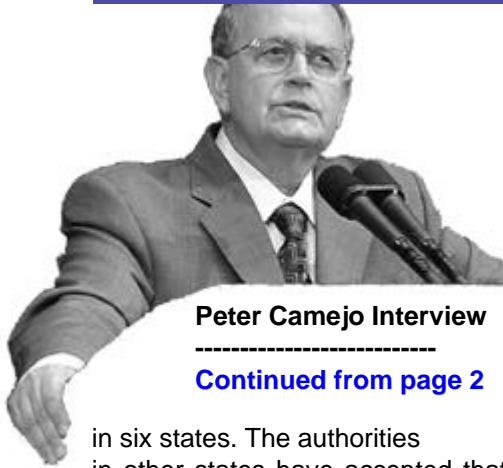
The social forums, be they regional or local, cannot risk their existence by becoming tedious and reiterating talks that are taking place simultaneously in different sites. And although one can agree with Wallerstein that the WSF, “represents a qualitatively new alignment of forces and strategies for change,” this can only become true if the social forums can deal with the needs and demands that people have regarding their daily lives, which does not mean that, as Wallerstein also argues, “we need to remedy a failing system, but rather prevent its negative effects from getting worse in the short-run.”



It is important to note that all these mobilizations, forums, summits and encounters only show that the current political spirit of social organizations, movements and individuals, does not necessarily represent clear proposals for “another world is possible and necessary.” What seems to be emerging beyond this resistance stage is that movements are aiming higher by politicizing and democratizing their struggles

and organizations. In that sense the social forums are becoming and can go deeper, by creating a counter-hegemonic movement and set of ideas. What I mean by this is that in these social forums new political cultures, democratic and participatory, can act as antechambers of the society we want to build. Finally, as Peter Marcuse states, “social forums today and tomorrow can make a major contribution to the goals of the social movements represented within it, even though it itself is not (yet?) the nucleus of such a movement. That would mean that it would continue to work under the banner of all social movements in the past: improving the lives of the majority of the people, in cities and rural areas, wherever the need exists.” Ultimately, the ASF, as a new experience taking place in this hemi-

sphere, can become the more useful space to bring together people who have never met or converged in the past – a place in which young people, peasants, women, indigenous, people of African descent, gays, lesbians and transgender people, intellectuals/academics, trade unionists, NGO participants, environmentalists, children, and the disabled can meet, think, organize, and struggle for a better world. ■



Peter Camejo Interview

Continued from page 2

in six states. The authorities in other states have accepted that the Reform Party does exist.

Tate: Why are you on the Nader ticket?

Camejo: Ralph Nader is the one voice in the United States saying that it's wrong to vote for the war, for the Patriot Act, to vote for candidates who have opposed the labour movement and the environment. Bush and Kerry, agree with each other on all the major issues. Kerry's posture in this campaign is about how to best implement Bush's policies. We don't agree with that. We believe what Bush has been doing is wrong. We believe you have a free election when people can hear different platforms and can vote for them.

The Democrats have a candidate in Kerry who gave Bush eighteen standing ovations, on one day in January. It's very peculiar to have a candidate who so admires this President that he gave him eighteen standing ovations, and is now running against that President as a candidate. That's what we now have. Kerry voted for everything Bush asked him to vote for, even stating he agrees with Bush on his policies on education, the environment, labour, the war, the Patriot Act - on every issue.

Kerry is calling for lowering taxes on the corporations, who now are paying the lowest tax rates ever in their history, while they have the largest profit margins ever. Nader is

the one voice that has stood up against all this, so I was very happy to join him as Vice-Presidential candidate.

Tate: I'm sure our readers would like to know how you address the charge from the Kerry camp that a vote for Nader is a vote for Bush?

Camejo: We think a vote for Kerry is a vote for Bush; a vote for Bush is a vote for Bush, so we think it's really Bush versus Nader. The only reason we are saying this is because in America, like in Canada, we have a "first past the post" system, and therefore, the will of the electorate is manipulated because people don't feel free to vote for whom they want. In fact, the most amazing thing about this campaign is that the overwhelming majority of those who will vote for Kerry do not agree with Kerry.

It is very peculiar to have an election in which a candidate expects to win by getting people to vote for him who do not approve of what he stands for. The "first past the post" system is the reason.



In reality, Kerry is stealing all of Nader's votes. There are people who are voting for Kerry but who agree with Nader and should be voting for Nader. If the Democrats really believed in free elections, they would long ago have proposed that we have a system that avoids such a situation or have a system that allows proportional representation, so that if a political party gets 20% of the vote, they get 20% of the seats. But the Democrats are opposed to democracy, they oppose free

elections, they want to give the impression of an election without actually allowing one.

The most important thing about elections is that the various points of view that exist in society should be represented. The Democrats very much oppose this and are doing everything they can to prevent this from being a free election.

They don't want Nader to be on the ballot. They don't want the people to be free to vote against the war and against the Patriot Act in defense of the constitution of the United States. They prefer to limit the election to two individuals who are fighting over implementing the same platform.

Tate: How is the issue of Iraq affecting the election?

Camejo: That's the main issue of the campaign. There are polls that indicate about half the population of the United States are opposed to the war - that is about half agreeing with the overwhelming majority of the world. Only the Nader ticket advances this position. It is amazing to watch how these two corporate-backed parties, the parties backed by big money, do not respect the will, not only of the people of the world, but of the American people. They don't want the overwhelming majority of humanity to be allowed into the debate. This is the central issue of the campaign. It's the central issue we present and our support, which is in the millions of people, comes primarily from those people who say, "No matter what, I just cannot vote for a candidate who's for war."

Our support right now primarily comes from among young people, from among Arab Americans, from Muslims, of which there are 7 million in the United States, all who really see the importance of the issue, and who see that Nader alone stands for the views of the overwhelming

majority of people in the world.

Tate: Are you getting much support from the anti-war movement?

Camejo: There was a march recently, of half a million people in New York in which I participated; all were against the war and against Bush. The amazing thing to me is that these people, while they're against the war, plan in their majority to vote for war. On the march you could tell the depth of their confusion and their guilt over this, because they weren't carrying signs in support of their candidate, who is John Kerry.

The whole march was almost completely empty of election signs. On the whole march, I only saw one, a woman was carrying a sign that said she was for Kerry. I walked over to her and suggested that perhaps she was at the wrong demonstration, because this was an anti-war demonstration and yet she was carrying a pro-war sign. It's a contradiction some anti-war activists have. They feel they've become victims, they're trapped, and they're like prisoners of a political system that's designed to imprison them and to prevent them from ever being able to vote for what they truly believe in.

Tate: What is the Nader/Camejo ticket saying about the "Star Wars" missile defense system?

Camejo: We're completely opposed to it. We think it's a total waste of money. It's not defending America from anybody, or anybody from anything. Once again, it's a promotion of the military industrial complex, designed to give Americans the impression that there is some kind of gigantic danger to them somewhere and that this system is somehow going to protect them. We just don't agree with that.

We think the problems American

citizens face from terrorism are due to a continuing crisis, in terms of relationship, between the United States and the Arab and Muslim world, with a great amount of antagonism and hostility to the United States. But that's generic.

Right now the entire world is hostile to the United States and its policies. We're seeing more and more individuals who may be determined to act against the United States and against individual Americans. The American people are more and more in danger from the policies of their own government, which in violation of international law, occupies and invades other countries.



The fact is the United States supported Saddam Hussein and supported Osama Bin Laden. This is their policy coming back to haunt them from the past. They promoted terrorism and promoted terrorist organizations that now have become anti-American and are using the very methods the United States military trained them to carry out. But terrorism is always wrong, no matter who is using it for whatever ends.

The United States, in order to defend itself against this danger, needs to change its social, economic and political policies towards the Middle East, and become support-

ive of democracy in the Middle East, instead of continuing to support totalitarian regimes such as the one it has installed in Iraq by military occupation and those that exist in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Jordan, etc. All these dictatorships are supported by the United States.

Tate: An issue that concerns Canadians is NAFTA. What's the ticket saying about it?

Camejo: We're opposed to NAFTA and the World Trade Organization. We regard these as governmental organizations whose leaderships are not elected by anybody, but which are created by the corporate world to make decisions on the environment, labour, the promotion of capital, all kinds of decisions about trade, which governments then implement. We think that this is wrong.

All these organizations are set up to provide cheap labour throughout the third world for the major corporations, to lower environmental standards and to permit the continuing destruction of world's ecological system.

Tate: What's happening with the abortion issue ?

Camejo: We're pro-choice. We're for full rights for women on all issues. Kerry tends to be for this also and the Democrats generally agree with us on this and are both in opposition to the Republicans. On this issue, there is a difference between the Democrats and the Republicans. If the Democrats were exactly the same as the Republicans, they would be useless to the Republicans.

The way the Republicans look at the Democrats, it's the Democrats job to prevent any serious opposition developing to them. They want an organization that appears to be different, and which can →

co-opt any opposition which may appear, such as on the war or other issues.

Some issues like the rights of women and the abortion issue are used as a peg, for example, essentially as to who's going to be nominated for the Supreme Court. This becomes a reason for everyone to write off all major issues and announce that because the Democrats and Republicans are in agreement on one or two things that they will therefore vote for them.

I think the issues around women have enormous validity but deep down we still see the Democratic Party's failure to do a whole series of things that are important to the overwhelming majority of women, such as raising the minimum wage. Many women suffer the consequences of a declining minimum wage that has dropped almost 40% in the last four years.

These are issues that are important for women, like issue of choice, which we stand for and defend, as opposed to the Democrats and Republicans.

Tate: Are you getting much black support?

Camejo: When I ran for governor in California against Arnold Schwarzenegger, percentage-wise my largest vote was among African-Americans. Second highest was among Latinos. Both African Americans and Latinos voted 2:1 percentage-wise for me, compared to European-Americans.



The Green Party in California has become a party whose mass base is now in the youth, among working people, the poorest people in California and people of colour. In the case of the Presidential race, Nader may be the only candidate whose votes come from a majority of people of colour, because between the Latinos, African-Americans and especially the Arab American community, we're at about 26% in the polls.

This may be the first time a majority of non-whites have voted for a presidential candidate. In truth, I think many organizations – such as the Latino and African-Americans, – are very much controlled by the by the Democratic Party, just as it controls the unions, the not-for-profit organizations and the NGO's. The Democratic Party has a strangle hold on these. Many people have become their prisoners.

What we've noticed recently is the beginning of a rebellion against this. In California, the president of MAPA, the Mexican-American Political Association, the traditional organization of the Mexican-American people, recently, publicly left the Democratic Party and joined the Green Party – in a public registration, which he did at the Secretary of State's office.

We've had leaders in the African-American community, and other Latinos, who are beginning to change and leave the Democratic Party. But this is all at a very early stage.

Tate: What's happening with organized labour? Is it continuing to support the Democrats?

Camejo: Organized labour, a long time ago, accepted a strategy to work with and to support the Democrats politically. The end result is that trade-unions have declined from 37% of the population to under 12%, and play a diminishing

role in American society.

Labour is unable to grow, unable to organize - the laws and the policies of the government prevent it. This situation has been brought about by the two-party system, especially by the Democrats and is a result of the union leaders' failure to break with them.



These union leaders take the dues from their memberships and without consulting them, give tens of millions of dollars to the Democratic Party. This relationship is like a revolving door with positions and appointments given out, etc., where the leadership of the unions and the Democratic Party politicians are both in a game of corruption.



They are tied together and in return for better union support for the corporate world, labour and working people in America are left without any real political representation and without any real defense of their interests.

Tate: During the last presidential campaign when Nader was a candidate, some hoped that a permanent organization would come out of it. Are there any beginnings of a class alternative to the Demo-

crats and Republicans emerging after this election?

Camejo: After the election in 2000, Ralph Nader worked very hard to build the Green Party. He did forty-one different events, engaging in fundraising and recruiting to the Green Party. His campaign led to the very rapid growth of the Green Party and the election of over 200 people throughout the country and now 1,000 candidates running for office.

In the 2004 election, we in the Green Party decided to become part of a broader coalition and Green Party members are the largest number of people backing Ralph Nader. He also has the support of many independents, some people who have come out of the Democratic and Republican parties including elements of the Reform Party. It's a broader campaign than in 2000, even though the ticket may get fewer votes. It reaches out to other forces because people are starting to rebel, especially around the issue of the Patriot Act, the deficit in the government and the war.

This is all beginning to create a break and an interest in alternatives. In the Green Party a peculiar event took place, where, even though the primary showed an enormous victory for Ralph Nader, one candidate who opposed Ralph Nader, who only got 12.2% of the vote in the primary and who also lost in all the major state conventions, nevertheless was able to pack the Green Party convention and win by a small margin. This has created a big crisis.

The Green Party is now very divided, but it is still the dominant third party. It continues to grow and the overwhelming majority of the members support Nader. A caucus called, "Greens for Democracy and Independence", is being formed inside the party, demanding democracy, for internal elections to be upheld, respect for majority vote

and the will of the membership. On the issue of independence, the demand is that the party must remain completely independent of the Democratic Party.

There's no question that Democrats were influencing the convention and trying to get the Green Party to vote for Kerry and run a candidate that would not oppose Kerry, which is what has happened. There's now a big division in the Green Party with the majority supporting Nader and a minority which is supporting a person who has a strategy they call "faith based", where they call for a vote for the Democrats in certain states.

Tate: Was that primarily in California?

Camejo: At the Nader-Camejo opening rally in California, where the Green Party is the strongest, we had 1,000 of our supporters there from the Bay area. David Cobb, who is the official candidate of the Green Party, held a meeting where only thirty-five people attended, in an area where we have 40,000 members. Only thirty-five people showed up for his campaign meeting!

Virtually no one supports David Cobb. Only a handful, primarily individuals, are backing him and in reality they are backing Kerry. In this sense, their whole campaign is a farce. It's a tragedy that it's happening inside the Green Party, as it will cost the Green Party very heavily, probably in terms of losing members and having to battle this out.

There is, however, among the periphery of the Green Party, people who are loosely connected, a lot of people who are influenced by pressure from the Democrats to vote for Kerry. This has become the basis of the Cobb current in the Green Party. There is a real clear left-right division, with the majority of the party being with the left and supporting Nader, and because of the impact of the

Democrat Party, a growing minority supporting Cobb.

The Democrats don't hide this. All the Democratic Party influenced press congratulated the Greens when they voted against Nader in the convention and supported a pro-Kerry person.

Tate: The Green Party in Ontario is quite conservative. But it seems to me the Green Party in the United States is different. Is this so?

Camejo: The Green Party in most countries of the world embraces an ecological programme around the crisis of global warming and other issues concerning the environment. It tries to get all the political parties to adopt platforms on these issues. It tries to make society aware of these issues. In that sense, the Greens play a positive role.

On other issues the Greens may support all kinds of different platforms, and are not necessarily for social justice, for improving democracy or other issues. But in America there is neither a labour party, nor a left party or socialist party. There have never been in the last fifty years, almost one hundred years, any large forces that are politically independent from the corporate world, therefore the appearance of the Green Party immediately takes on a different colouration.

The Green Party in America is not a party only organized around environmental or ecological issues. It is the beginning in America of an alternative party that challenges especially, the anti-labour, anti-discriminatory, racist policies, and international policies, etc., of the two major pro-corporate parties. So the Green Party is not a typical Green Party at all.

Tate: What is the attitude of the various left groups to the Nader-Camejo campaign?

Camejo: The small groups that call themselves leftists or socialists are still much divided. The International Socialist Organization now is the strongest in America, has the most young people in it and is the most active. They're working very hard to support the Nader-Camejo campaign and are very effective in their support. They have a lot of influence on the campuses and they've been very helpful. They also have people in the labour movement.

There's another group, Solidarity, which is doing a lot of work in the labour movement. They are very supportive and have been in the Green Party for a long time, and have been very helpful. Regarding the remnants of the Stalinist currents, the Communist Party and Maoist group, they're all pro-Democratic Party. They've always been for the pro-corporate party.

Other people who are considered leftists, or independents, are around Global Exchange. They're supporting Kerry. All of these organizations that are dependant on funding from liberals or liberal Democrats, fear they will be crushed financially. It's very difficult to maintain an organization like Global Exchange and not be pro-Democratic Party because the Democrats can cut you off.

That's how the Democrats function and the not-for-profit and environmental groups, to avoid being destroyed financially, simply go along with them. So we have some organizations like that, which are supporting Kerry, and not Ralph Nader. But as for those who are in the socialist currents, which are very small, there is a division between those who have come from a Stalinist background or the historically conservative, social democratic backgrounds, and others.

But what is of interest is we're seeing more and more people, unlike anything since the sixties when there was a massive radical shift by Americans, breaking with the Democratic and Republican parties. Twenty-five percent of the American people are no longer registered Democrats, or Republicans. That's the highest it's ever been in the history of the United States.

Tate: There seems to be more hostility in this election season than in the last one on top of the chronic problem of voter apathy. What's the explanation for this?

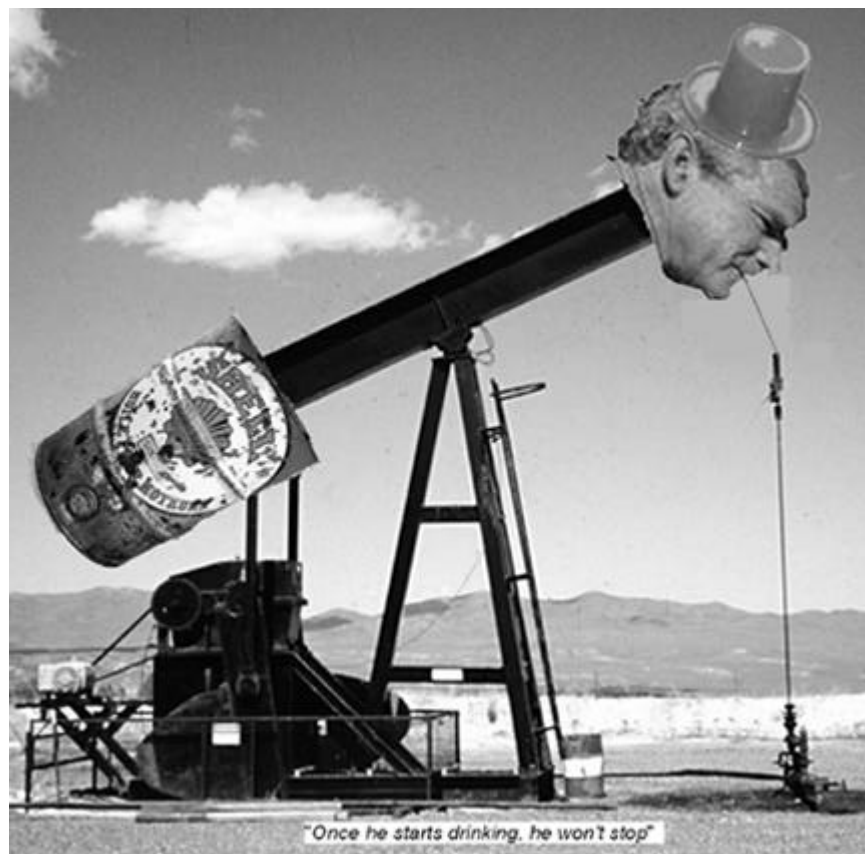
Camejo: This is partly due to a shift in the policies of the United States government in the last four years. The reason the government gives is the 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States, but I think the real reason is we're reaching a peak in oil consumption, and control of the Middle East is essential for all the advanced industrial countries. Their economies need all the oil they can

get.

The United States has the largest military and it has made the decision to arbitrarily violate all international laws to get control of the oil. This change in policy has been very scary to a lot of progressives and liberals who have always depended on the Democratic Party for leadership and they've watched that party giving standing ovations in support of this policy and they see the Democrats voting for the Patriot Act, which takes away our constitutional rights, they see them voting for the war against Iraq.

It puts progressive and liberals in a state of shock and they just think to themselves that the only reason the Democrats are doing this is so they can get elected. That's an extremely peculiar phenomenon. We have tens of millions of people who will vote for Kerry, hoping he's lying about what he himself believes.

It's like a kind of psychological



trauma that is happening in our society. Of all those people who agree with Ralph Nader, the majority are going to vote for John Kerry and the people who agree with Kerry, are going to vote for Bush. And the people who actually agree with Bush and are voting for Bush, really need psychiatric help because with his positions on everything and what he's doing, he's also disconnected from reality.

Tate: Can some kind of "left" convergence take place around your campaign, and continue after this election?

Camejo: There has certainly been a development of groups working together in our campaign, but I don't see a left convergence taking place in the United States at this stage. How things will proceed in the next period is very unclear.

The Green Party has a membership in the order about half a million people. It is increasingly becoming a big centre of progressive activity, but only electorally. The Green Party is not very active at other levels.

The anti-war demonstrations are organized by people who are mainly outside our organization. The Green's support the demonstrations, but doesn't take the leadership of them. The Green Party is a rainbow of opinions about of a lot of issues that have come together within a single organization. There's been a recent shift in the approach of other progressive and left organizations, but until now they have not become members of the Green Party. That's now beginning to happen. They're

following what Solidarity did in joining us. I think others will too. But I think there's some feeling among progressives that the Green Party has too many internal problems and difficulties and that it may not be the instrument that they think can be most effective in making social change.

At this stage I'm urging everyone to join the Green Party and help us fight to keep it independent of the Democrats and to democratize its internal structure and deepen its involvement in the community, for example, in the unions. We have tens of thousands of members in California's unions, but we have yet to organize them. We have been trying to organize caucuses in the unions and this, I think, is how the next period could go if more forces keep joining.

We are making headway among Latinos, especially in California. We feel it's possible we could become an arena in which different progressive groups begin to work together to build an alternative force against those who favour the government's policies towards labour.

Ninety percent of our people, in the last few years, have made no financial gain when you make adjustments for inflation, in a period in which the GDP of the United States has risen more than ever in its history. At this moment, profit margins are now the largest ever in the history of the United States. Corporations are now paying the lowest tax rate they've ever paid. They once paid 33% of all our taxes; now they're only paying 7.8%. Meanwhile the

minimum wage has dropped from \$8.15 to \$5.15, adjusted for inflation.

But there are changes happening where the Green Party has had influence. In one city, because we elected a person to one position, we were able to have the minimum wage raised to \$10.50, and in another to \$8.50.

We have also succeeded in giving the right to undocumented workers to vote, a democratic right that's now on the ballot because of the influence of the Green Party in San Francisco. We can see the beginnings of an alternative political force emerging, and it would be good to have all those who are doing work in other areas to come into the Green Party and work together.

But there is no unanimity on this. For example, we have a party in California called the Peace and Freedom Party which has about 70,000 registered members. While we're starting to work together—in my campaign I'm welcoming one of their candidates to speak with me at all my meetings – we have yet to bring our two forces together.

The Green Party has 160,000 members in California and the Peace and Freedom Party has 70,000. Therefore, there are about a quarter of a million people in California who have clearly broken from the Democratic and Republican Parties. That lays the basis for the beginning of a movement that will fight for social justice. ■

September 8th, 2004.

[*www.avocadoeducationproject.org/pdf](http://www.avocadoeducationproject.org/pdf)



Neoliberalism, the Liberals and Living Wages

By Greg Albo



It is now one year since Ontario gave the hard right Tories of Mike Harris and Ernie Eves the boot from office. Dalton McGuinty's Liberal Party, not unlike their Federal counterparts under Prime Minister Paul Martin, pledged an end to the cutbacks and a return to a responsible 'caring' Ontario. To be banished from public discourse was the 'poor-bashing', 'Native-bashing', and 'union-bashing' that characterized the Harris years of government – the 'divided province' strategy of the good risk-taking entrepreneurial Ontarions against the welfare-dependent, ever-complaining and lazy rest. *Punitive austerity* was the theme of the day – a theme that could find certain neoliberal origins in the Social Contract of Bob Rae's NDP government. In contrast, McGuinty promised to pursue a 'one province' strategy, conjuring up again the old ghosts of social partnership, consultations, community hearings. But with little actually to offer, after the incredibly opportunistic and shortsighted decision to sign a pact with the devil on earth – the Ontario Taxpayer's Federation – McGuinty's government has only offered *shared austerity*. Ontario politics now has a new discourse and the repetitive chant that 'we are all in it together' in facing the government's fiscal shortfall, as if the pain of curtailing social spending is felt as equally by Barbara Amiel and Conrad Black as the homeless under the Bathurst St. overpass and the seniors waiting for medical services in Elliot Lake.

The continuance of the neoliberal juggernaut during the first year of the McGuinty government was precisely the theme of a Socialist Project Forum held at Ryerson University on September 15, with several of the most important movement activists in Ontario today. Natalie Mehra of the Ontario Health Coalition addressed the continued privatization push in the health sector despite the accords being reached by the Federal and provincial governments in Ottawa. With one in seven in Ontario living in poverty, Kim Fry of the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice made the case of how little the Ontario government has done to address poverty in Ontario, with social assistance rate increases barely meeting inflation, and the increase in the minimum wage not coming close to meeting the loss of purchasing power through the 1990s. Mary Catherine McCarthy of CUPE continued the indictment noting that the problems of contracting out and public service cutbacks plague the public sector across Ontario, provincially and municipally. And Bryan Evans of Ryerson University and the Socialist Project traced out some of the neoliberal continuities recurring in public policy across different political regimes. The left now needs to see neoliberalism not as just mistaken policies, this or that government, but the way power is organized in our society today.

All the speakers raised the importance of re-establishing the so-

cial coalitions, and union-community campaigns that have waned in recent years. In particular, targeting clear campaign objectives that could be leveraged into wider movement building was noted. The wider political impasse of the left, particularly the deplorable state of the left and rebuilding projects, could also not be avoided, in the eyes of many. To this end, several fightbacks of CUPE in the education sector and the Health Coalitions politicization of P3 hospitals have been critical beacons of light.

It is important that the living wage campaigns developing in the province gather a similar momentum. These have taken to date the form of the OCSJ's Ontario Needs a Raise project, with many community groups and union locals doing educational and campaign work on welfare rates, minimum wages, disability rates, the child benefit clawback, and, in some cases, union organizing. This is an important project which the left needs to get behind to begin reforming the social unionism and movements that neoliberalism has done so much to curtail. Many groups have planned demonstrations, educationals and other events on October 2nd to mark the one year anniversary of the McGuinty regime, insistent that poverty be addressed, against all the dashed hopes that is to date the government's main accomplishment.

Check out www.ocsj.ca for more information. ■



Venezuela under Chavez:

The Bolivarian Revolution Against Neoliberalism

By Greg Albo

In spite of so many determined efforts of the past to impose a uniform architecture, there is no blueprint for making a revolution against capitalism. And there is just as clearly no single design for the Left today to break out of the straitjacket of neoliberalism, and re-open possibilities for more democratic and egalitarian social orders. Indeed, the thing about social revolutions is, as the saying goes, that they keep coming around in unexpected ways and in unexpected places. Who would have dared predict the eruption that was Seattle in November 1999, when the powers behind neoliberal globalization seemed completely incontestable? And who would have then predicted – certainly none of the sages of the global social justice movement who quite consciously moved to the margins the issue of winning state power as another failed blueprint – that Venezuela under Hugo Chavez would emerge as the key zone asserting that alternatives to neoliberalism must not only be asserted but tried? But this is exactly the importance of Chavez and the Bolivarian revolutionary process, as the Chavistas refer to their struggle, for the Left at this juncture.

The politically-charged context that has become Venezuela revealed all this and more during the August 15th Presidential Referendum on President Chavez's tenure in office. Coming to power in 1998 after the self-destruction of Venezuela's 'stable democracy' through the 1990s, Chavez pushed for passage of Venezuela's Bolivarian Constitution refounding the Republic. The new

Constitution was a massive departure in the extent to which it deepened democratic proceduralism, rights and citizen initiatives in a direction completely alien to what liberal democracy has become. Indeed, the new Constitution allowed for a presidential recall vote if enough signatures could be gathered, an entirely unique process that could not even have been imagined in Latin America before Chavez. Although the signature campaign was filled with irregularities, and mounting evidence of external funding from the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy and other offices, Chavez declared that the Referendum should go ahead. The political arithmetic in the President's office was coolly calculated: the failed military coup of April 2002 and the disastrous disruption of the oil sector later that year by the Opposition, allowed the Chavez government to consolidate in turn control over the military and the state oil company PDVSA; a failure to defeat Chavez in a Referendum would leave the Opposition in further political disarray and advance the social base for the Chavista reform agenda.

The Referendum result itself was electrifying and anti-climatic at one and the same time. The Chavez 'No' against removal of the President was resounding at almost 60 percent of the vote, with 4-5 million more voters than when Chavez was first elected, and adding to the string of electoral victories of Chavez and his followers. But the Opposition signalled its rejection of the results, to

what should have been no one's surprise, before the Venezuelan Electoral Commission could even report. This act was pure theatre and it signalled that the play was far from over and that the ruling classes still in place would use their economic and social power to disrupt, discredit and wear down the government as best as they could. This, too, the Referendum results recorded: the insistence of the poor and the Chavista cadres to get on with the job of constructing a 'Bolivarian' Venezuela, and the declaration of the Opposition that much of the ground for construction had yet to be broken.

This has been the point of 'political rupture' where the old ways of doing things are no longer sustainable if the new ways are to be given life and allowed to develop their independent course. More than one process of social transformation has turned back at this point, or hardened itself into a permanent war setting to attain stability for the new regime at all costs. But others have pushed ahead. The tasks of the social transition are no longer only of winning the political terrain, but foremost of fostering the democratic and organizational capacities of 'the people' to deepen and forward the revolution. This is precisely what Che meant when he complained, well into the Cuban revolution, of the lack of control over the bureaucracy and that "we can consider the need for organization to be our central problem." Chavez and the Bolivarian revolution is, in its own specific way, at this juncture in the struggle against, and effort to move beyond, neoliberalism in Venezuela. The importance of Chavez to those outside Venezuela is that the Bolivarian movement is again posing the question of 'what we want to become' and not just of 'what we no longer want to be' after all the destructiveness of the last decades. And that is why the vote for Chavez in August, it needs to be said, was a vote for the Left everywhere, that can only be paid back by re-imagining our own movements. ■

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