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RELAY

A SOCIALIST PROJECT REVIEW



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About 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.

Relay is published by the Socialist Project. Signed articles reflect the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the editors.

About the Socialist Project

The Socialist Project does not propose an easy politics for defeating capitalism or claim a ready alternative to take its place. We oppose capitalism out of necessity and support the resistance of others out of solidarity. This resistance creates spaces of hope, and an activist hope is the first step to discovering a new socialist politics. Through the struggles of that politics – struggles informed by collective analysis and reflection – alternatives to capitalism will emerge. Such anti-capitalist struggles, we believe, must develop a viable working class politics, and be informed by democratic struggles against racial, sexist and homophobic oppressions, and in support of the national self-determination of the many peoples of the world. In Canada and the world today, there is an imperative for the Left to begin a sustained process of reflection, struggle and organizational re-groupment and experimentation. Neither capitalism nor neoliberalism will fade from the political landscape based on the momentum of their own contradictions and without the Left developing new political capacities. We encourage those who share this assessment to meet, debate and begin to make a contribution to a renewed socialist project in your union, school and community. For more information on the Socialist Project check our web-site at www.socialistproject.ca or e-mail us at info@socialistproject.ca.

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RELAY II ■ CONTENTS

November /
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2007

Canada

Limited Horizons: Assessing Ontario's Election	Bryan Evans and Greg Albo	4
The McGuinty Victory	John Peters	8
Another Quebec is Marching!	Gabrielle Gérin	13
A Case for a New Centre of Revolution in Canada	Ken Kaltornyk & Karen Naylor	16
Economics Explorer	Ingo Schmidt	18

Labour

CUPE's Agenda for Change	Dan Crow	23
Unions Cannot Afford More Magna-type Deals	Sam Gindin	26
The Union had a Dream	Jay Johnston	27
Ottawa Hotel Workers Exercise their Right to Strike – and Win	Kevin Skerrett	28
New Zealand Union Succeeds in Organizing Young Workers	Roger Annis	30

Toronto Labour and Community Organizing

The Rise of Toronto's Living Wage Campaign	John Cartwright	32
Measuring the Miller Regime	David Kidd	38

The Soviet Experience

The Russian Revolution: 90 Years After	David Mandel	41
Contradictory Foundation for the Future	Herman Rosenfeld	44

Culture Front

Class War Muse, an Elephant by Other Means	Joe Rosenblatt	47
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Cover – “**For the Sake Of The New Century: Turn The Page**” – 2000: ‘At the turn of this New Century, with the earth still in the possession of a tiny group of Capitalist hustlers still willing to strangle it in the search for more profit, the figure of Lenin is due for revival. Everyone is, in fact, waiting. We will hear from those in fear. The great majority, however, anticipates the beginning of deliverance.’

The artist, Richard Slye, passed away Oct 2, 2007 at his home in Nova Scotia. Rick began his political involvement with the civil rights movement in the American South. Later active in the peace movement, he came to Canada when his draft card came up. As an active artist, Rick worked with many progressive movements in Canada, producing work for numerous books, magazines, posters and exhibits.



Assessing Ontario's Election

Bryan Evans and Greg Albo

There are two signal observations to be made of Ontario's October 10th election. First and foremost, the voter turnout: the lowest voter turnout to date had been 54.7% recorded in 1923. This was 'bested' on October 10th when those motivated to cast a vote fell to a new record low of 52.8%. Declining turnout has been a consistent trend since 1995 and even then turnout was a full ten points higher than this last election. Given the serious economic and environmental issues confronting Ontario this is indeed cause for serious concern. There was an opportunity here to mobilize and galvanize workers and students around a range of issues of immediate importance. These included: the meltdown of Ontario's manufacturing sector, sharp social polarization of incomes and wealth, renewed momentum for nuclear energy and a referendum on electoral reform. Yet, an army of Ontario citizens were less than motivated to be interested in what the three main parties had to say.

The second point is the actual result: the Liberals took 71 seats, the Conservatives 26 seats and the NDP seat total was 10. For the governing Liberals, it was a loss of 1 seat compared to the election four years ago, and a decline in their total vote by 4.2%. The hapless Tories gained two seats, while their popular vote dropped by 2.4%. And the NDP gained 3 seats, although two of these were holds from previous by-election wins; their popular vote climbed a modest 2.1%. The Greens won no seats but won 8% of the vote, a gain of 3.7%. Yet, Premier Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal's victory has been heralded as the consolidation of a new political dynasty! Such is the detritus of bourgeois electoral reporting.

The electoral disinterest is not without explanation. Another round of neoliberalism was clearly all that was on offer between

all the parties, including the Greens and the NDP. Small differences do matter, and there were mild differences in the platforms of the four parties with respect to adjustments in social spending, public schooling, proportional representations and modest refurbishing of a declining public infrastructure. But the Conservative, Green and Liberal party positions all openly favoured the pro-market, pro-business agenda of neoliberalism.

The NDP's proposals were absent any sense of current power structures, ideas for building up new platforms for democracy, or significant breaks from neoliberal fiscal and administrative policies. For the NDP, the Green's rise in vote and platform in several key areas raises serious questions for its viability as a meaningful electoral agent. Its position as a vehicle for substantive reform has long been sacrificed. This requires some elaboration.

Empty Slogans: 'Go Orange!'

For Ontario's New Democrats, the fall election was yet another disappointing result in a string of poor showings since the defeat of the Bob Rae government in the mid-1990s, after its turn to neoliberal policies. The NDP went into the fall election with ten seats and came out with the same. One new seat was won in Hamilton, but the winner of a Toronto by-election some months ago was unable to retain the seat. The vote increase by 2.1% over 2003 to a total of 16.8% of the province-wide popular vote is still well below the NDP's pre-Rae government average of 24%. The New Democrats came very close in several more ridings, including one lost by a miniscule 36 votes.

But voters in many ridings with a history of voting for the New Democrats were not sufficiently moved, in sufficient num-

bers, to cast a vote for what historically had been their party. The NDP slogan of “Go Orange” rang hollow, sounding like some over-priced advertising consultant’s “bright idea.” It was a slogan empty of any content and it failed to motivate voters generally, or to speak to workers particularly.

The NDP campaign platform consisted of six proposals: (1) a \$450 health tax rebate for those earning under \$48,000; (2) an immediate increase in the minimum wage to \$10/hr.; (3) an environmental ‘right to know’ law which would require that manufacturers divulge what toxins they are releasing into the environment; (4) an addition of \$200 per student into Ontario’s education system; (5) a tuition fee roll-back to 2003 levels; and (6) improved home care and thus reduced wait times. In many respects it was similar, though not as fulsome as the Liberal platform.

The cliché assessment of the NDP in Canadian politics is ‘liberals in a hurry’. This was an agenda for ‘liberals at a crawl.’ It was the sort of program any public servant or party bureaucrat (in consultation with the usual array of public relations and polling flacks) might cobble together on a sheet of paper if asked to. It bore no resemblance to the struggles of key movements at the moment (and bizarrely even some of the things Hampton and the NDP had spent the last Legislature working on, such as energy and wider living incomes issues).

In a time of neoliberalism, the agenda might generously be considered as a set of helpful proposals, at least partly inconsistent with more market-based measures. But that would indeed be generous. It was not a coherent program built around a vision of a more equal, democratic and sustainable economy. NDP officials, when asked ‘why these items?’, simply responded: they were easily implementable should the NDP be in a position to shape the agenda of a minority government. This was as boneheaded and political clumsy thinking as one can get: narrow the agenda as much as possible before the election; run a campaign that is symbolic and about broken promises and features the agenda as a marginal feature; and then hope that you can turn to negotiate over a few flimsy items in the election platform in the case there is a minority government. It is all too easy for any political wag to point out that not only was the program impoverished, that the tactical political calculation behind it was both lacking in imagination and crude to an extreme, but that it also failed to appeal to any particular voting constituency.

The issues of industrial decline, the growing gap between rich and poor, a radical shift on environmental issues and an alternate energy policy, for examples, were all possible campaigning issues for social democrats that would have partly staked out alternate political options and challenged Liberal policies. Plans for more rapid pacing of minimum wages, more information on pollution or minor increments to home care provisions were not going to excite anybody in particular, and were only going to draw equally a big yawn from the Liberals and voters.

In the last week of the campaign, NDP party leader Howard Hampton berated the media for ignoring the key issues of the cam-

paign with their obsession with the faith-based schools proposal floated by Conservative leader John Tory. He had a point, as the state and private mass media have both become ever more facile and subordinate to capitalist interests in their political coverage. The image and spectacle has, indeed, come to dominate over analysis of ruling interests and everyday struggles and life in news coverage. But this was also Hampton and the NDP spectacularly failing to take responsibility for the dreary emptiness of their “Go Orange” campaign. There was none of the larger problems confronting Ontario’s working people being addressed in their own campaign either.

But it also spoke to the NDP’s own pathetic failure to promote a single public school system, and use this as a basis to attack the spread of private and charter schools, when given the massive opening to do so. The Greens, in contrast, immediately raised the question of funding for Catholic schools and unequivocally stated that all education should be secular. This distinguished the Greens from the rest. Moreover, along with the stronger position in favour of proportional representation, the Greens re-tacked their campaign to exploit these differences with the other parties.

The NDP, in contrast, banally mimicked the Liberals and defended the status quo, a position that dates back to the NDP’s back-room support for the extension of Catholic school funding in the 1980s. The NDP’s burying of support for proportional representation in the referendum confirmed the status-quo reading by the electorate as well. The NDP has become barely distinguishable from the Liberals. They both occupy what exists as the centrist political space under neoliberalism (this is the same political space that has been the basis for the many ‘grand coalition’ governments across Europe).

The success of the Greens in winning 8% of the popular vote also spells trouble for the NDP. The Green showing can be interpreted several ways. But there can be little doubt that the Greens, in the electoral imagination and their own self-identification (something clearly less true for, say, the German Greens who have become cold militarist political calculators), stand for something good and positive: defence of the environment and spread of democratic participation. There are, indeed, serious ideological questions to be directed at the Green’s proposals: they have thoroughly embraced market ecology and their vision of society is one comprised almost wholly of consumers and small, “off-the-grid” entrepreneurs. But that is not the point here. They embody a vision. The ‘old line’ parties saw their vote drop more than 7% in this election. But rather than cast their lot with the NDP, the Greens were the primary beneficiary of voter dissatisfaction but also reaped gains for their positive vision of a single, secular public school system, a more inclusive voting system and improved ecology and energy policies.

The NDP programmatic stance today, in Ontario but also in other provinces and nationally, is much less clear than the Greens. The incompetent Ontario NDP electoral campaign further muddied matters. Historically, labourist parties like the NDP have been parties of protest, of incremental reforms to ameliorate the →

worst excesses of capitalism and parties of unions and workers. Those angry with the two 'old line' parties would vote for the New Democrats, but also support positive measures for redistribution, the extension of public space and democratic reform. That is now anything but clear. Social democracy's "Third Way" policies of better training, support for creative high-tech industries, global trade and less government policy activism are wholly consistent with neoliberalism. The Liberal Party of Ontario has equally been capable of implementing them as an alternative to the hard right policies of the Conservatives under Mike Harris. Even standing for a single secular school system was too much of an electoral gamble for the NDP: the movement of protest and the reformism are now gone. So too, increasingly, are the unions and workers.

Ontario's Divided Unions and Working Class

The NDP's electoral timidity and programmatic drift has added to the divisions, for good and ill, within Ontario's working class. It is no secret that since the Rae government of the early 1990s, various Ontario unions and indeed large parts of the NDP's political base have become and continue to be indifferent toward their traditional political home. The ongoing weakness in NDP voting strength is a function of this history. But it also is a result of the failure of the Days of Action of the late 1990s to keep pushing on with the political struggle against the Tories and neoliberalism.

Some unions and their leaders, particularly public sector unions like CUPE and private sector unions like USW, collapsed back into an electoral compact with the NDP. In some cases, this has still meant continued solid activist campaigns, such as the USW pensions and restructuring fights at Stelco or the UNITE-HERE hotel organizing campaigns. Some local labour councils, as in Toronto under John Cartwright, have also engineered innovative organizing campaigns. But there is only silence from these unions about the political level these campaigns must eventually be fought at by unquestioning allegiance to the NDP electoral machine. This is the case even when the NDP offers so little in return. Political crumbs are better than nothing in an era of neoliberalism.

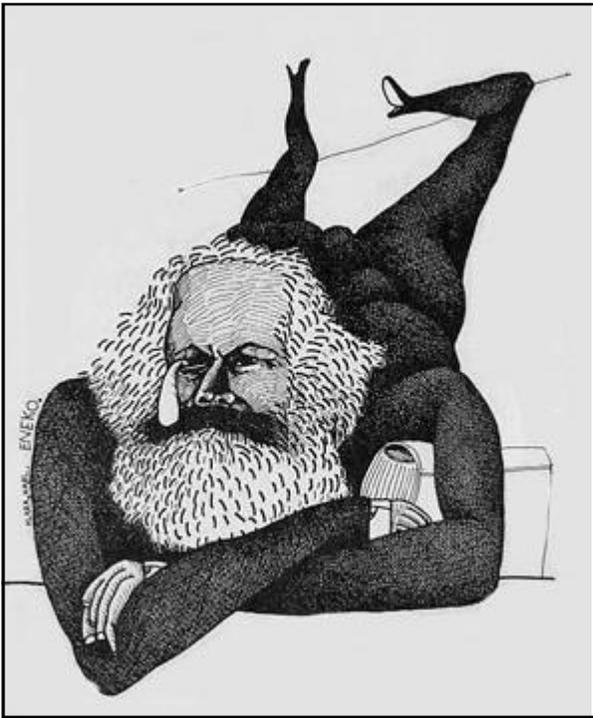
Since the late 1990s, other unions drifted away from the NDP to form a looser political entente with the Liberals. Notably, the CAW used the personal rupture of Buzz Hargrove with the NDP as a cover to what had been occurring any way as the CAW leadership moved increasingly toward company unionism and political conservatism. They were joined by other unions in the building trades, commercial sectors and white-collar professions. This is the return of old-style North American Gompersism: get whatever you can for your existing members, from whomever you can, and

wherever you can as long as the bargaining terms retain some formal semblance of independent unions. In a period of neoliberal globalization, this is the embrace of international competitiveness, company loyalty and teamwork as the practical ideology of unions.

Public sector professional unions have often felt most comfortable with such an orientation, as union practices then mesh with the ideology and policies their members are actually implementing. The CAW transition over the last decade has been breathtaking: from social unionism and concessions-fighting to competitive unionism and engineering agreements with givebacks and no-strike clauses. In the 1990s, the CAW and other unions were in battle with the so-called 'pink paper' unions calling for a new approach to bargaining and policies that the NDP should pursue. They were then rejecting such revisionism and calling for greater militancy. The CAW left the Ontario Federation of Labour, keeping the dues that went with membership for independent and more 'radical' political work. The CAW now positions itself to the political right of these unions and has gone far beyond them in adjusting to neoliberal times.

The union division took an additional form in the last election with the creation of an advocacy group called 'Working Families'. The group was composed of the CAW, two teachers' unions and several of the building trades unions. While the group did not endorse any particular party, its efforts could easily be seen as an endorsement of the programme and record of the McGuinty Liberals as opposed to the former Conservatives. The 'Working Families' coalition represents an organized break with the NDP. It is fuelled by short-term brokerage politics and deal making by certain labour elites who can strike a bargain for their specific organized sector. But the longer-term political and cultural significance of this development cannot be diminished.

In both cases of a re-embrace and desertion of the NDP, social unionism has given way to pragmatic politics and competitive unionism. Each is reflective of a defensive posture in the face of neoliberalism. Not one union and not one union leadership in Ontario has moved toward a more militant posture of class struggle unionism since the Days of Action mobilisation. The union support that underpinned the social justice networks across Ontario, and numerous cross-union social movement campaigns, has been extensively withdrawn. And if support for social campaigns has not been completely withdrawn, it is more a case of unions 'contracting-out' the political work to poorly-paid campaigners, with little effort to mobilize their own memberships to form real community-union-movement relations. There have been no new political directions taken at the level of the CLC, the OFL or district labour councils. No new anti-neoliberal alliances formed. Neoliberalism in the province is all but uncontested at the level of political forces, if not in the everyday resistances of people's lives as they cope with its consequences.



This political fracturing and drift has meant that all the efforts at organizing in new sectors, reaching out to racial and ethnic minorities facing social polarisation and precarious work situations and supporting immigrant workers' rights, take place in an unfavourable social context. There are no wider political supports, campaigning resources and ideological supports for this necessary work. Very good conferences, successful particular campaigns and inspiring strikes for rights no doubt occur. There is no new organization of social forces, ideologically or in new political formations, which represents a shifting – or the potential to shift – the overall balance of political power. Elections in liberal democracies are limited events, mainly serving as a momentary barometer of political conflict and power. The fall election in Ontario mainly registered the further consolidation of neoliberalism and the continued fracturing of progressive political forces.

Hard Lessons (Again) for the Socialist Left

There are two further hard lessons for the left to take account of. First, there is a clear relationship to the disorganization and political drift analyzed above and the disastrous result of the referendum on electoral reform. Ontarians voted 63.1% in favour of keeping the present first past the post electoral system. Only 36.9% voted for change. In fact, the proposal carried in only five of the 107 ridings – all in the core of Toronto. It is interesting to note that of these five, four are held by the NDP. Had the NDP, one must ask, made this too a central aspect of their campaign (even to the extent of the Greens), rather than bury the issue as they have done so repeatedly in the past, might a different outcome have been possible? The NDP refused to take the opportunity to link electoral reform to working class economic and political in-

terests. The disintegration of social justice networks added to the difficulties of campaigning. It is clear that the level of radical political organization, and ideological leadership, in Ontario is such now that even particular single-issue campaigns that have broad popular resonance can falter badly.

The second hard lesson is obvious, but cannot avoid restatement. With few organizational resources and small numbers, the socialist left is as marginal a force as it has been in more than 70 years. The October 10th election results stated loudly that the class struggle at the level of electoral forces is very nearly imperceptible and not particularly influential. This is a simply register of wider organizational capacities in workplaces, communities, cities. There is instead the electoral weakness and political realignment of the NDP; and the emergence of a contemporary Liberal-Labour alliance taking the corporate form of 'competitive unionism.' This alliance may well spread from the auto and educational sectors into other unions, further pulling the entire ideological spectrum into a position of accepting neoliberalism. Such political pressures and organizational imperatives have already dramatically impacted the policy stances of the NGO and non-profit sectors.

The socialist left, however, remains largely blinded from observing the need for its own realignment and reformation. Some still are caught in the prison of the debates of 1917; others are, embarrassingly, still animated more by directives from London or Havana; some still believe against all evidence that social democracy is an alternative to capitalism. Many, particular younger activists, remain animated with the 'politics of chaos' and spontaneity of the anti-globalization movement, failing to notice that there is no longer a movement and rather than chaos there is the steady rhythms of neoliberalism. Others agree on the need for the left to move on, but for some 40 years now always conclude that the timing is not quite right. This is the impasse that the neoliberals and the new corporatists take much comfort in.

Still, it is possible to suggest, even with minimal imagination, that unified and coordinated efforts of socialists could have a real and meaningful impact on struggles against poverty, protecting and expanding public services, building an immigrants' rights movement and re-establishing union capacities to struggle in workplaces and sectorally. There is a pressing need to establish a socialist counter-pole in educational and cultural work as well. There is potential to advance any number of these struggles in confronting the McGuinty government over the next years. Without such a development of new political capacities on the socialist left, however, the political horizon of the next Ontario election may well be even more limited than this one. **R**

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“Liars, Twits, and the Ennui of Democracy”

The McGuinty Victory and the Problems of Third Way Politics in Ontario

John Peters

Liars, twits, and the ennui of democracy. That may be the best way to sum up Ontario’s recent election.

Sadly, the most likely results of the Liberal victory in Ontario are not much better – job loss in auto and forestry, and the ‘inconvenient truths’ of pollution, poverty, inequality, along with failing public transportation in major urban centres.

On October 10, 2007, Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals won their second straight majority government in Ontario. Even though it was the first time in over seventy years that a Liberal premier had won two straight majorities, it wasn’t much of a surprise. Going into the election, all the pollsters were predicting a close race and even a possible minority government. They couldn’t have been more wrong.

Following the general rule in countries with first-past-the-post electoral systems, where only small electoral minorities are needed to form government, McGuinty simply duplicated his 2003 victory by turning the support of 22% of Ontarians (1.8 million votes out of an 8.4 million electorate) into a massive majority in the provincial legislature.

budgets, more investment in schools, and vague promises of improving the environment. With four of Ontario’s six major economic sectors doing well – finance, construction, mining and metals, along with the small business service sector – wealth lubricated an upbeat mood among a small minority of voters and provided the base of Liberal support.

It also helped that McGuinty again drew another woefully inept Conservative opponent – the aptly named John Tory, who like his 2003 predecessor Ernie Eves, showed himself just as inept at policy as at campaigning, and quickly shot his party in the foot with an education proposal – seemingly drawn from the 19th century – to extend public funding to all “faith-based schools.”

Tory – a failed, long-time Conservative campaign hack and former television executive – staked his campaign on “Leadership Matters”, and quickly showed he had none. Attacking the McGuinty Liberals for breaking their promise not to raise taxes but instead implementing a health premium that helped cover the 5 billion dollar deficit, Tory berated McGuinty as “the greatest promise-breaker (ie-‘liar’) in world history” – more than a little hyperbolic given the last few years of world history.

But the charge quickly became hypocritical when Tory himself, after seeing the polls plummeting for the Conservatives on education, abruptly – and without precedent – reversed his key education policy promise in mid-campaign by offering only a ‘free vote’ on education funding if elected. Thus Tory won the less prestigious “Ontario Twit of the Year’ given by voters on election night.

It was his second such award. He had earlier won ‘Twit of the Year’ for his role as the campaign manager for Kim Campbell’s Conservatives in the 1993 federal election, when he helped reduce the Conservatives from government to just two seats. Now with his own personal defeat in his riding, it is unlikely Tory will win a third as it is expected he will be forced to resign or

be given the boot in short order by the many ‘George Bush wannabes’ waiting in the wings of the Conservative caucus. Already veteran Conservatives like John Snobolen – the former high

Real Popular Vote and Ontario Election Results 2007

	Votes*	Real Popular Vote**	Seats
Liberals	1,866,000	22%	71
Conservatives	1,397,000	16.5%	26
NDP	742,000	8.8%	10
Green	354,000	4.2%	0
Did Not Vote	3,959,074		

*Votes are estimated to nearest thousand

**Real Popular Vote is percentage of votes received from total electorate of 8.38 million

Winning the vast majority of seats in Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, and Northern Ontario, the Liberals won the support of urban, mostly middle-class voters generally contented with balanced

school dropout and ex-Minister of Education – have asked that Tory step down before next spring’s party convention and leadership review.

The NDP did not fare much better. Again finishing a distant third in popular vote and seats in the legislature, the NDP will also likely be reviewing their leadership in the near future. Led by Howard Hampton, the NDP’s colourful but less than stirring campaign theme was ‘Get Orange: A Fair Deal for Working Families.’ Hampton, whose media comfort zone is reportedly ‘narrow’ – somewhere between dull and too earnest might be more accurate – again rolled out the same campaign of 2003, and apart from their few ridings of support, again was tuned out by the vast majority of Ontarians.

More distressing were the basic facts that in shifting the NDP to the centre over the past three elections, and trying to make the party more ‘sellable’ through offers of tax cuts, property tax freezes, and electricity rebates, Hampton has only seen party fortunes stagnate, membership rolls decline, and young voters turn to the Greens. The only bright spot was when Hampton finally showed some emotion during the last week of the campaign, and in attacking Tory for derailing the election campaign into an education debate no one wanted, Hampton boosted the party’s popularity to a modest 17 percent of a record lower voter turnout on election night, and came within a handful of votes of picking up two more northern ridings.

But more worrisome for the NDP and organized labour was that at a time when key industrial sectors are facing the continuing loss of thousands of manufacturing and resource jobs, the labour movement in Ontario is now more politically fragmented than ever. Major private sector unions such as the Canadian Auto Workers and those in the building trades are currently openly supporting the Liberals and publicly sparring with the NDP and other unions over everything from auto policy to election advertising, party financing to the basic principles of trade unionism and trade union organizing.

With this division only growing deeper, and the NDP permanently mired firmly in third place (only slightly ahead of the Greens). With no electoral reform on the horizon, they may well be stuck there for some time to come.

Indeed, it now appears that the Liberals in Ontario are set to be the inheritors of the old ‘one-party/Red Tory’ dominance that has been the norm in Ontario politics. But this is a new kind of ‘Red Tory’ — more a ‘Third Way’ or ‘smiley, happy’ version of neoliberal policies seen commonly throughout Western Europe today.

A Made in Canada ‘Third Way’

Because if the election was something of a snooze-fest, far more interesting is what the Liberal victory said about the state of Ontario politics today. For in many ways, what the McGuinty Liberal victory shows is that there is some political traction in using

a modern, moderate, ‘Third Way’ version of neoliberalism – a version based on attempts to build across-the-board appeal through policies peddled as ‘modern’, ‘responsible’ and ‘competent’, while including neoliberal elements such as tax cuts and balanced budgets.

Similar to Tony Blair’s Labour Party attempt to construct a ‘Third Way’ in Britain, as well as other examples in Western Europe, the McGuinty Liberals ‘smiley, happy’ platform also embraces what are typically perceived as ‘post-materialist’ concerns with the environment and gender equality as these issues are perceived by the professional classes (apart from class and distributional issues). It also looks to uphold education and health as the traditional liberal institutions necessary for middle-classes to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, while protecting them from the risks of ageing, disease and accident.

To top it off and to actually make this ‘Third Way’ politics work, the McGuinty Liberals have adopted a politics of ‘inclusion’ by creating a new public face for Ontario. A number of Liberal cabinet ministers are openly gay. A number are women. The Liberal caucus is also by far the most ethnically diverse of any provincial government in Canada today.

In direct contrast, McGuinty himself is a middle aged, white lawyer, a barely adequate public speaker, and comes across as a too-earnest school board chair – well-meaning, but a bit of a bore. Nonetheless, the combination of white and ethnic, gay and women, white-bread lawyers and hip, cosmopolitan up-and-comers, is something new to the traditional male-bastion of ‘reward your friends, punish your enemies’ provincial politics.

What also makes the McGuinty government something of an anomaly in provincial politics is that, outside of Alberta with its immense oil revenues, the McGuinty Liberals are the only one to recently come to office promising to hold the line on taxes, subsequently reversing course early in the term by introducing a large health insurance premium – and then championing more government spending on health care and education – while still bringing in a balanced budget.

Equally remarkable is how well this ‘competitive liberal’ strategy has worked over the past two elections. Because if looked at critically, throughout much of southern and eastern Ontario, Liberal appeal would appear to be only weak at best. Based on electoral and technocratic concerns rather than the ideological criteria of markets and sacrifice, the McGuinty platform has few attractions to many business people, as well as many upper and middle income earners, who continue to embrace a ‘capitalist frontier’ view of reality that taxes are theft and social distribution for losers.

In addition, there is a large segment of blue collar workers who consider the policies favoured by the Liberals to be products of a conspiracy of the rich – looking to promote their own cultural and moral agenda, the elite are trying to sell their urban platform of acceptance and openness at the expense of their own values →

and interests. In the United States, these voters are known as ‘Blue Collar Republicans.’ In Ontario, and perhaps most tellingly in Oshawa – the largest auto town with largest local of the Canadian Auto Workers that has for well over a decade voted solidly Conservative – blue collar voters simply see themselves as having ‘good common sense.’

But regardless of self perception – or for that matter, polices or candidates – many blue-collar Ontarians regularly vote for Conservatives believing the party stands for hard work, the family, and the ‘right’ things in life. This despite the fact that in reality many in the Conservative upper echelons could care less about these values, and are far more concerned with tax cuts and economic policies that underpin corporate greed.

The Discrete Electoral Cynicism of Greg Sorbara

The person most responsible for getting around these political and electoral hurdles, and turning a minority of voters into a second majority government, has been finance minister Greg Sorbara, who now with another electoral victory behind him, is stepping down from his portfolio.

Sorbara, a personable and charming lawyer from a family of developers in north Toronto, was the Liberals chief campaign director, and along with veteran campaign strategists Warren Kinsella and Don Guy, was key in making McGuinty electable by transforming ‘new’ liberal politics into good economic sense.

For mining companies as well as lumber and paper mills, there have been tax write offs, grants and incentives for new investment and energy efficient plants. For contractors and transport companies – especially throughout Northern Ontario – the Liberals have put in place multi-million dollar new highway programmes. For ageing middle classes, as well as workers and their families, the Liberals are building new hospitals – with private financing – and new cancer and long-term care throughout Ontario. These policies have offered not only security, but just as importantly, new employment opportunities and public investments that support house values of a middle-class electorate.

The investments in primary, secondary and post-secondary education have done the same. With incremental changes to education funding formulas that have increased school budgets and the hiring of another 33,000 into education over the past year, the Liberals have won the whole-hearted support of one its key supporters – the primary and secondary school teachers.

In these ways, Sorbara increased programme and infrastructure back to earlier norms from 12.9% of Ontario’s GDP to 14.4% within three years, and showed himself a keen political architect of a ‘Third Way’ politics that uses programmatic, moderate,

‘boosterism’ to help build the Liberals into the ‘natural party of government’ for two elections in a row.

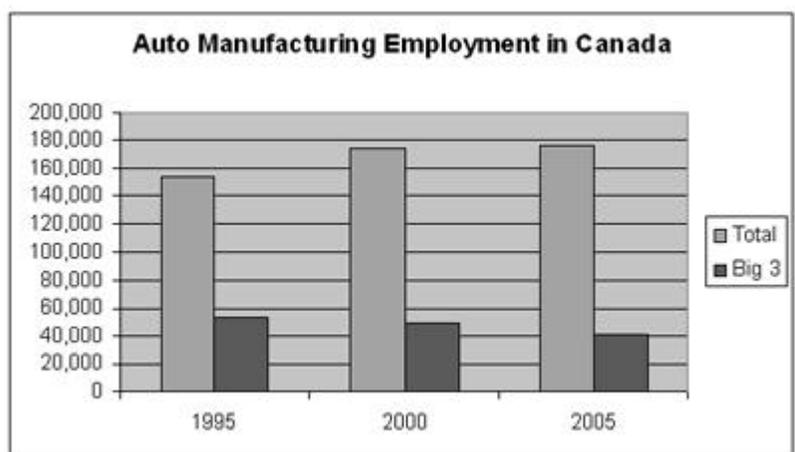
Helped by the salesmanship of a health insurance premium that has brought in \$3 billion more annually, Sorbara and McGuinty were able to eliminate the \$5.6 billion annual deficit left by the former Harris Conservatives. Such sound fiscal ‘helmanship’ only further cemented the minority public view that Sorbara and the McGuinty Liberals were the party that can make the tough choices.

But whether McGuinty’s plans come to fruition for the long-term will depend on how well they deal with Ontario’s other two economic sectors – auto and forestry – and whether they can continue to finesse their way through the problems of layoffs, the environment, municipal debt and poverty.

On these counts, current prospects do not look as rosy. Already the McGuinty government will be starting off their second term behind the eight ball -without Sorbara at the cabinet table. Nor is there anyone within the party that has yet distinguished themselves as savvy or smooth enough to gloss over problems and talk bottom lines with supporters, business people, and unions alike.

The Inconvenient Truths Facing Ontario

On top of this political liability, there is a long list of problems headed by the loss of 148,000 manufacturing jobs since 2004, and the loss of 30,000 unionized auto jobs in the past two years. The Liberals have introduced a \$500 million auto fund and are planning more. But so far, in doling out more than \$235 million to GM – topped up by another \$200 million from the Harper Conservatives – and with no real strings attached to the subsidy, GM has said ‘thank you very much’, and currently plans to reduce jobs in Ontario by another 5,200 by 2008.



This has only continued the recent trend of the Big Three shedding some 11,000 unionized jobs over the past twelve years, unionized suppliers closing up shop and non-unionized, Japanese manufacturers and non-unionized supplier plants continuing to expand throughout Ontario. In the current climate of heightened competi-

tion, multi-national downsizing and expansion abroad, the McGuinty government's policies of underwriting new investment for the Big Three will do nothing to assure jobs for an industry governed by the laws of profits, share value and cut-throat competition.

The same is true in forestry. A \$80 billion industry nationwide, and long accustomed to considerable market swings, lumber and paper mills have recently seen the loss of 42,000 jobs and the downgrading of the debt and stock of all the major forestry giants. Many American and Canadian multinational forestry companies have tried to weather the storm by signing onto billion dollar mergers. But worsening the downturn has been the collapse of the building boom in the United States and the sub-prime mortgage fiasco, as well as a new soft-wood lumber deal that put a lid on sales and prices.

Caps on electricity costs and subsidies for energy conversion will do little in the industry to assure jobs. Nor will these policies make big conglomerates suddenly realize the benefits of sustainable production. There are no plans to do anything else.

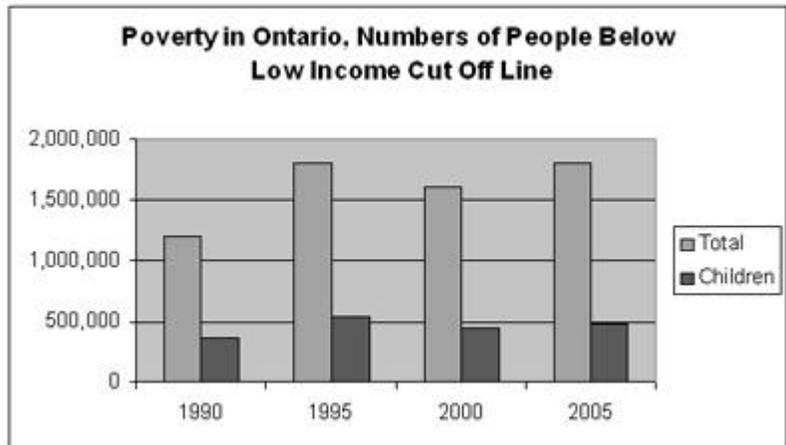
Nor do current policies for the environment appear much better. Ontario is already one of the worst polluters in North America. But plans to close the coal-fired power plants by 2007 have already been pushed back to 2014. And to keep the lights on without producing global warming green house gases, the Liberals are preparing to build two more nuclear power reactors – a clear case of killing the environment now to kill it again later.

Policies to deal with Ontario's cities are just as ill-conceived. Thanks to Mike Harris, Ontario is the only state-level jurisdiction in the advanced industrial world to make its municipalities fully responsible for social housing and social assistance, and the primary funder of transit, child care, public health and shelter services.

In less than ten years, Ontario cities have seen their deficits balloon. Toronto, at 5.2 million people is Canada's largest urban centre (by itself larger than six of Canada's smallest provinces combined) and has an annual fiscal deficit of half a billion dollars to match. As a consequence, Toronto has transit, poverty and homelessness problems of astronomical proportions that have no provincial comparisons. Without any of the advantages of provincial royalty revenues, federal transfers or federal support, there is little hope for Toronto or other now teetering Ontario municipalities.

Prior to the election, Sorbara had promised to extend one of the subway lines north by 2010 and boost transit funding for under-funded cities like Toronto by 2017. The Liberals have also promised to upload some of the social assistance costs from municipalities.

But Ontario currently has more than 1.8 million living below the poverty line, and Toronto is now the unofficial "child poverty



centre" of Canada with 345,000 estimated living in poverty – 44% of the total number of Canadian children living in poverty today. Toronto also has more than a quarter of its workforce in low-wage, non-standard, part-time and temporary jobs – the majority of these worked by women and immigrants.

For a party that proclaims, "We are all in this together", the Liberals will face even louder opposition charges of 'broken promises' in 2011 if they do not address these problems in a serious and credible ways and also challenge the Harper Conservatives to invest the federal surplus into cities and social programs.

Simply claiming – as they have done time and again throughout the past election campaign – that they 'feel the pain of cities/people/or fill in the blank' and that they will work to address these 'in the near future/next year/or in the next decade', will not be enough.

The Ennui of Democracy

There is little reason to be optimistic. In their recent election victory, the McGuinty Liberals were able to turn the election campaign into a debate on education and the inadequacies of John Tory while saying little about health care, the environment or vanishing unionized manufacturing jobs. But the Liberals also proved themselves masters in orchestrating their concern for electoral reform, and then setting up the referendum to fail – effectively securing phony majority governments for some time to come.

The referendum – the first in eighty years – followed similar votes in BC and PEI, and was driven by the facts that 87 of 130 countries in the world now use proportional representation and that industrial countries that use it throughout Western Europe have lower levels of poverty, inequality and better social programmes. Facts that electoral commission after electoral commission have made clear time and again over the past few years.

Yet few Ontarians seem to know what the referendum was about or why the public was being asked to vote on this issue. Liberal strategy was one of the main reasons why. First, the McGuinty Liberals expressed their concern for electoral reform. →

Then they appointed a citizens commission a few months before the election and quickly gagged it. Next, they prevented the commission and Elections Ontario from openly debating the recommendations or their report during the campaign and limited discussion to the 'choice' of winner-takes-all 'first-past-the post' or the 'alternative.'

But just to make sure electoral reform went down to defeat, they banned all political parties from campaigning on electoral reform and encumbered the referendum with a double 60% rule to pass: 60% of total votes, and 60% of the ridings to pass. A Liberal-Conservative "No" campaign then swung into gear, threatening lawsuits if the Liberals allowed the commission to 'influence' voters, and followed this up with 'fill in the blank' letters-to-the-editor that supporters around the province dutifully sent into major dailies.

The result of 2.6 million "No" votes to 1.5 million 'Yes' to electoral reform was about as good as could be expected. But what this means is that the McGuinty Liberals have apparently decided that their winning streak is far from over. Not surprisingly, (considering that only 22% of Ontarians are actually needed to elect a majority government into office) the Liberals are eager to retain a traditional plurality voting system that has rewarded them with large electoral victories twice in a row. So much for the Liberal's much talked about efforts at 'democratic renewal' and creating a 'stronger democracy.'

Rather, as the Liberals showed, electoral cynicism and inequality comprise the gold standard by which winning provincial politicians operate in Ontario and twits, liars and me-first governments still aptly encapsulate Ontario's political present. The fact that roughly half of Ontarians are no longer interested in voting appears not to be of any pressing concern. Nor do the McGuinty Liberals seem much interested in anchoring practical progress to anything like a real broadening of opportunity.

For the 'smiley, happy, Third Way' versions of neoliberalism this is about par for the course. Whether in Britain, Germany, or for that matter, Ontario, what the Third Way vision of 'pragmatism with a conscience' really seems to be about is championing a world where government does very little aside from selling a politics of sympathy. What 'investments in social infrastructure in a context of fiscal restraint' is really code for is softening a few of the consequences of a world dominated by business and profit.

If the McGuinty Liberals are going to show themselves any different except in their public face from the Mike Harris-types and Stephen Harper's of the world, they will have to do a good deal more than they have so far accomplished in the past four

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years. As 78% of Ontarians showed on election night – either by voting for other parties or simply not voting at all – expectations are pretty low. **R**

John Peters teaches political economy at Laurentian University, Sudbury, and has been active in CUPE politics.



Another Quebec is Marching!

Afterthoughts on the Quebec Social Forum

Gabrielle Gérin

The Quebec Social Forum (QSF), which took place in Montreal at the end of August 2007, was the first event of this type organized in the province, and arguably one of the largest reunions of the left in Quebec history. After having provided an overview of the event, its organizational process and particularities, I will present my view on the impacts it may well have had on social movements and the left in Quebec, and on the pertinence of creating spaces such as the QSF in the current socio-political context.

A Quantitative and Qualitative Success

Quantitatively and qualitatively, the event went far beyond the expectations of most. Over 5,000 persons participated in the workshops, conferences and artistic demonstrations programmed – 2,000 more than anticipated by the organizers. The diversity of participants was quite striking not only in geographic and generational terms, but also in terms of the various interests that brought them to the Forum. In addition to the large variety of dedicated activists from every social movement, generation and region of Quebec, there also were a great number of “simple citizens” interested in gathering information and exploring ways to contribute to social change.

The number and diversity of organizations involved in the event made the QSF a historically unique event for the left in Quebec. They were all there – or almost all: feminists, unions (with the notable exception of the FTQ [Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec] leadership), students, ecologists, socialists, various rights defence groups, community organizations

and the indigenous movement. Quebec Solidaire also actively mobilized its members to participate in the event, though it was based on a non-partisan principle.

This diversity was also expressed in the richness of the content of the QSF program. With 320 workshops and conferences to attend within two days of activities, most participants were often forced to make hard choices. Rooms were generally full – or packed! – and the audience participated actively in the discussions. Some workshops witnessed interesting dynamics develop, where hierarchies were put into question, and genuine determination and solidarity were expressed “from below”. For example, during a panel on solidarity between the student and trade-union movements, members of the audience (often trade-union members) vehemently and unanimously condemned the two trade-union leaders on the panel (Claudette Carbonneau from the CSN (Confédération des syndicats nationaux) and Henry Massé from the FTQ) for having been so condescending and reluctant to show pro-active solidarity with the student movement in 2005, and even pressed them to follow the students’ leadership in contesting neoliberalism.

This combination of experiences and ideas in an open and non-hierarchical space produced surprisingly energetic exchanges, and a strong sense of unity through diversity and action. The necessity to organize combatively and on a broad range of issues in response to conservative and neoliberal onslaughts, and the possibility of doing so collectively and effectively were palpable during the event, owing in great part to the quantity and diversity of participants present. →

The Assembly of Social Movements (ASM)

The Assembly of Social Movements (ASM) was the closing event of the Forum. It was organized by a group of organizations, under the coordination of the Fédération des Femmes du Québec (FFQ), and was also a first in the history of the left in Quebec.

A feminist marching band opened the assembly, and brought the roughly 500 persons present to their feet, chanting “Contre le capitalisme, je me lève et je résiste! Contre le patriarcat, je me lève et je me bats!” with their fists in the air... a rather surreal sight! This was followed by the reading of the “Social movements’ solidarity call”, a considerably radical and determined text paying tribute to the various struggles against neoliberalism and oppression in Quebec and throughout the world, and calling them to unity and determined collective action. The declaration was received by a long-standing ovation, and over 150 organizations had added their signatures to the text by the end of September. The proposition to undertake coordinated actions all across Quebec at the end of January 2008 (a response to the call for worldwide mobilization sent by the World Social Forum (WSF) organizing committee) was also well received – the common denominator of these actions being the lighting of fires, in order to put light on the various struggles being fought “in the long and cold Quebecois winter”.

There were over a hundred interventions from the floor during the ASM – most were calls for solidarity on the part of other movements for struggles that are coming up in the short term: the student struggle against the raise in tuition-fees, the imminent campaign against poverty led by the Coalition pour un Québec sans pauvreté, the struggle against the privatization of health services, the campaign for the right to unionization for migrant agricultural workers, the struggle against Canadian mining companies’ activities inside and outside Canada, the on-going indigenous struggle and others. Many interventions called for more openness on the part of institutionalized social movements to new activists, and for more inclusive and accessible language and organizations.

Louis Roy, first vice-president at the CSN, made a strong call to restoring and building unity within the trade-union movement.

The ASM was a singular mix between organizations of all sizes and milieus and activists of all kinds. The mood was resolutely set on solidarity between movements, unity through action and renewed activity in struggling against neoliberalism and oppression. This was greatly enriched by the fact that this was a rather “informal” assembly – more like a plenary – open to all movements and activists: exchanges and language were not restricted by heavy procedures or the constraints of coalitional decision-making. It felt like walls were breaking apart between activists, as determination and solidarity were being built up. The experience was so interesting that many are thinking of holding semi-regular ASMs in the future. The ASM showed the importance and the potential for creating a political organization that can offer an open meeting space for activists from all social movements.

Organizational Process

The “Initiative towards a QSF” was founded in 2005, in the months following the Porto Alegre 5th World Social Forum, by a group of activists, mostly students, on an individual basis. Its goal was to initiate a process that would lead to the organization of a Quebec Social Forum, while putting strong emphasis on regional participation and on the horizontal, democratic and inclusive character of the process – one that would also be led by autonomous activists dedicated to the project rather than solely by organizations with heavy institutional interests.

After months and months of hard work, a date and site that seemed to content a great number of organizations and activists were decided upon by the general assembly. From then on, the list of organizations and activists supporting the QSF and involved in its organization kept increasing, while the same core of activists who had founded the Initiative still coordinated the process.



Though the continuing neoliberal offensive calls for collective solutions, social movements in most places have found it difficult to overcome the counter-pressures of their institutional interests and competing perspectives. In such a context, the weakness, fragmentation, and institutionalization of social movements in Quebec made the organization of an open and inclusive social forum a challenging task. Activists involved in the organization of the QSF had to cope with the complications provoked by the significant differences and contradictions between the practices, priorities and principles of the various sectors of social movements in Quebec: the challenge was to find solutions that could regroup a large variety of actors, attenuate divisions and create consensus and collaboration in spite of these differences. In my view, the QSF organizers were able, for this first forum, to overcome most of the fragmenting obstacles they were faced with. This can be partly explained by a political will on the part of the various leaderships of the social movements to gravitate towards finding collective ways to face the ongoing neoliberal and conservative onslaught. But the key to the QSF's success in grouping such a great diversity of organizations and activists together was probably the "neutral" and dynamic role played by the core of activists that coordinated the process in developing solutions and principles that would create consensus, within an organizational process that didn't force organizations to work in "coalition" but rather in an autonomous way around a collective project.

Impacts of the QSF

The QSF was organizationally successful – but will it have real, profound impacts on social struggles against neoliberalism and oppression in Quebec? The WSF is often criticized on the basis that it is not a space for the formal coordination of social struggles: the critics argue that tangible results therefore don't flow out of it and that its impact can only be limited and vague, forums merely acting as a shallow, pat-in-the-back type of "festivals of resistance." These critiques – and others – are usually rapidly applied to all other social forums, whatever their scale and organizational process.

It is my argument that national/local social forums contribute significantly to addressing certain problems that have been paralyzing social struggles in the occidental world today, namely: the over-institutionalization, parcellization and non-political character of social movements, their lack of democracy and inclusiveness, restraining the development of dynamic self-activity "from below" and the more general sense of powerlessness and resignation induced by the ideological and socio-political domination of the right and rising conservatism.

In Quebec, we must add to this portrait the fact that the very dynamic, recent anti-globalization struggles, student strike, various community mobilizations against environmentally and socially destructive economic development projects, anti-war and other mobilizations have formed a whole new array of activists with no fixed institutional affiliation, but genuine interest in contributing to social change. In such a context, there was an urgent need to create spaces designed to redefine, enlarge, democratize, unite and bring dynamism to the left, from below.

The QSF aimed to act as such a space: its organizational process was a regionally decentralized, horizontal and open one, involving hundreds of activists and organizations. In its various assemblies, committees and regional collectives, important solidarity networks were built between groups of all sizes and sectors and activists who worked together around a common objective: in this sense, the mere organizational process of the QSF will have lasting impacts on the consolidation of a renewed left in Quebec.

While WSFs are accessible only to the privileged few who can leave home and work for a week and afford a short trip to another continent, a provincial social forum does not pose the same problem or, if it does, it's on a much smaller scale as additional measures were taken so that the event would be accessible to groups and people with limited means or who lived in distant parts of Quebec. This allowed for massive and diverse popular and organizational participation.

Participants in the QSF experienced a horizontal, participative and inclusive space. Not only was the programming process a participative one (activities were auto-programmed in advance by organizations and individuals), but so was the form of the workshops and sessions, meant to break with the traditional verticality of public events. In this sense, the QSF contributed to generating democratic and participative culture, practices and structures within social movements in Quebec. Moreover, the QSF gave its participants the opportunity to gather an incredible amount of information, to exchange experiences and analysis with other activists and to build solidarities and perspectives for common actions – hence consolidating social movements from below.

A particularity of the QSF was its thoroughly political character – by allowing various sectors and struggles to meet and exchange through their base and on a massive scale, the QSF not only helped those in attendance develop a more global understanding of social issues and struggles, but also generated a strong sense of unity, consciousness and political confidence. The QSF could be said to have reinforced all the facets of class consciousness in its participants: the consciousness of "us" (who we are, what unites us), "they" (who/what do we oppose), of the "alternative" (what do we want to build) and of the "how" (what strategy should be undertaken).

We must finally keep in mind that this was the first QSF: its success certainly will put that event on the map for Quebec activists in the future. The potential of this space will only be fully developed in forums and struggles to come, as organizations and persons prepare more thoroughly in order to make the most out of the event – one where the seeds of a dynamic and democratic mass political movement are planted and cultivated – and meanwhile engage in the social movement building, struggles and political activity necessary to complete this process. **R**

Gabrielle Gérin is a Masters student in Political Science at York University. She was a founding member of the "Initiative towards a QSF" and has been at the core of the organizational process of the Quebec Social Forum for the past 3 years.

A Case for a New Centre of Revolution in Canada

Ken Kaltornyk & Karen Naylor

By definition, revolution refers to a profound or fundamental change in the way things are. Within the context of modern capitalist societies such as Canada, it refers to the radical reorganization of the political, economic and social orders – the elimination of capitalism and its replacement with socialism. Evolution is popularly understood as the gradual, almost imperceptible, transformation of one thing into another. Since the emergence of the modern Canadian working class during the last decades of the 19th century two tendencies have existed within the working class movement: a revolutionary tendency and an evolutionary tendency.

For the first half of the 20th century, this division also existed within the trade union movement. On the one hand the Gompers-style craft unions stood for the gradual reform of capitalism, while, on the other hand, a section of the Knights of Labour, the socialist-led unions, the Industrial Workers of the World and, later, the communist-led unions stood for the radical, revolutionary transformation of society from capitalism to socialism. While certainly not the dominant section of the trade union movement, the latter unions and their socialist/communist leaders had a major influence within the broader working class movement, especially in Western Canada.

A radical change occurred in the Canadian working class movement during the Second World War. The Communist Party of Canada (CPC), which by then had become the undisputed leader of the revolutionary trade union movement, was declared illegal by the Mackenzie-King government and its main leadership was incarcerated. A mass mobilization led to the eventual release of Tim Buck and other communist leaders, but the party itself remained illegal. However, Mackenzie-King offered Buck a way

out of illegality. The party could regain its legal status if it dropped the word “communist” from its name and eliminated revolutionary change from its programme. Despite broad internal opposition, Buck was able to push this deal through and the party re-emerged under a new name – the Labour Progressive Party.

A key element in Buck’s victory over the more revolutionary sections of his party was the theoretical work of Earl Browder, the leader of the Communist Party of the USA. Browder, inspired by the alliance between the Anglo-American imperialists and the socialist Soviet Union, came up with a new version of the evolutionary path advocated by earlier socialists like Bernstein and Kautsky. According to Browder, the U.S. and Canada were exceptional cases. In those countries the capitalist class was young and democratic – at least those sections represented by the FDR Democrats in the U.S. and the Mackenzie-King Liberals in Canada. The Republicans and Conservatives were identified with the fascists and Browder advocated that the communists should ally themselves with the “democratic” section of the capitalist class against the reactionary, fascist section in the struggle for socialism. Browderism became the theoretical underpinning for Buck’s Liberal-Labour alliance in Canada and a similar alliance between the communists and the Democrats in the USA.

The impact of this Liberal-Labour alliance on the Canadian working class movement cannot be underestimated. For the first time in the 20th century there was no centre of revolutionary politics in Canada. The communist movement and all of the trade unions it led officially adopted a social-democratic stance – the “Peaceful and Parliamentary Road to Socialism” – and began justifying this position within the working class. The Canadian exceptionalism of the CPC reinforced the anti-revolutionary prejudices of the Gompers-style unions and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and the Canadian working class became convinced that revolution was neither possible nor necessary in “democratic” Canada.

The informal truce and alliance between Mackenzie-King and the CPC was formalized during the late 1940s and early 1950s with the adoption of the Rand Formula and the legal incorporation of the trade unions into the Canadian state with the passage of new labour laws. A crucial requirement for any trade union seeking legal status with the Canadian state was the adoption of a constitution pledging that the union would pursue class peace. On the basis of this definition various unions were declared illegal and hundreds of revolutionaries were removed from leading positions in the unions.

There was only room for one social-democratic party in Canada and the CPC was quickly replaced by the CCF/NDP as the “labour” component of the Liberal-Labour alliance. By 1956



This is Tim Buck, beloved leader of the people who are working to make Canada strong and free—a wonderful place to be.



the Canadian trade union movement was united in the new Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) on the basis of opposition to revolution, opposition to class struggle and opposition to communism. The Cold Warriors of the CLC collaborated with the state to purge the communists and other revolutionaries from the trade unions and to crush the remaining communist-led unions. With a few notable exceptions, during the 1960s and 1970s the trade union movement in Canada became a bastion of reactionary opposition to anything healthy and progressive.

The abandonment of revolution by the communist parties in Canada, the U.S. and Western Europe, coupled with the increasing anti-revolutionary rhetoric coming from the leaders of the Socialist Bloc, contributed to the emergence of a new revolutionary movement, primarily amongst youth and students, during the 1960s and 1970s. This new revolutionary movement was necessarily fragmented ideologically, politically and organizationally. The polemics between the Soviet Union and China were reflected in this movement, as was every other tendency which had existed in the working class movement since the time of Marx and Engels. Furthermore, the stranglehold of the Cold Warriors over the trade union movement made it extremely difficult for the new revolutionary movement to establish itself in the working class. For a variety of reasons, both internal and external, the revolutionary movement that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s and the various groups it gave rise to were unable to meet the challenges of the 1980s and 1990s and only fragments now remain. At the same time, a new generation is being increasingly attracted to revolution and socialism and conditions are emerging for this new revolutionary movement to take an organized form.

The problems facing the anti-capitalist left today are quite different from those that confronted us in the 1960s. The prejudices of Canadian exceptionalism have been further bolstered by the collapse of the socialist experiments of the 20th century. The state has become more sophisticated in its presentation of non-revolutionary alternatives to young people seeking change. At the

same time, the situation has become somewhat clearer. All of the things that the socialists/communists/revolutionaries of the 1960s and 1970s warned about are now becoming a reality. The post-war social compact between the capitalists and the trade unions is being dismantled and the Cold War trade unions are in crisis. The working class is demanding new forms of organization which can assist them to wage the class struggle more effectively.

Many things have also become clearer within that fragment of the revolutionary left that remains committed to the project of socialist revolution. The arrogance of putting ideological purity above organizational unity is a luxury we can no longer afford. Most of us have come to realize that ideological unity is a relative thing, usually not a possibility and often not desirable beyond a few crucial precepts. To the extent that it is achievable and desirable, it is the product of years of common struggle and discussion.

In the conditions that we face today, it is our belief that the re-establishment of a centre of revolutionary thought and action is the most urgent task facing the Canadian working class. Within this context, we think that the only principle requiring ideological unity for such an organization is the principle of revolution itself. All those who are opposed to capitalism and who support the transformation of Canadian society from capitalism to socialism should unite to build a new centre of revolution in this country. Differences over strategy and tactics, over forms of struggle and over the precise shape that socialism in Canada will take should be left to the future to sort out. No matter how much we convince ourselves that we have the “most correct” answers to the myriad of problems facing the working class, we are nowhere if we do not have an organization. **R**

Ken Kaltornyk and Karen Naylor are Winnipeg-based activists and members of the Manitoba Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist).



Economics Explorer

**Getting the questions right is hard
Finding persuasive answers is even harder**

Ingo Schmidt

This is the story of a Canadian woman that started to explore economic issues. The difficulties she encountered along the way led her to the conclusion that there are certain questions that can't be answered theoretically but only practically, by people like herself. The same experiences could have been made by a man and, in slightly different ways, in other countries. This is a good story if it encourages activists to refocus their theory and practice on political economy and class.

Economics: A worldly Religion or a Toolkit for Understanding?

It's hard to find any other subject that is both as ubiquitous and at the same time suppressed as economics. Radio and TV news talk about economics in the same way they talk about the weather, implying that in both cases complex forces are out there that determine precipitation and temperature in the first case and stock market prices, interest rates and exchange rates in the other. Mass media typically equates economics with financial news. Anyways, this news helps you to prepare for the next day as much as listening to the weather report; it tells you to either get sunscreen on or your umbrella out and also to reshuffle your investments in order to seize next day's profitable chances.

At times, when either a hurricane is approaching or a financial panic struck unexpectedly, news is transformed into a huge media spectacle. Overexcited reckoning about the next climatic move of financial behemoth alternates with pitiful reports on the poor victims who lost their possessions as a result of weather or financial storms. However, this is a spectacle for spectators. You are not supposed to do anything, let alone ask questions about causes and chances to prevent future catastrophes.

In case you are annoyed by sensational footage and smug talking heads that imply that you can't think and act for yourself, you may actually try to find out why there are recurrent climatic and financial catastrophes. Since it is usually helpful to do just one thing at a time, we may follow somebody who wants to explore the background of financial boom and bust. This is actually a good choice because the reasons of financial crises eventually lead to the understanding of an economic system that produces

not only disorder in the financial world but also rests on the exploitation of human labour power and natural resources in its pursuit of profit.

However, the one that just left her spectators role to become an economics explorer still has a long way in front of her before she can conclude that climate change, something that seems like a natural process, is actually man-made. Where can she go first to get answers for her questions about economic issues from financial crises to climate change? Let's see if there is something at the newsstand.

A number of daily papers, that are just as sensationalist as radio and TV news, and lots of magazines trying to persuade you to buy fashionable cloths, make-up, cars, boats and many other fancy leisure time gear. Eventually she finds something that talks about economics: Financial Times, Wall Street Journal, Business Week and The Economist. No sensations, just boring facts, numbers and a message that sounds familiar to some of the stuff the talking heads on radio or TV are saying: Politicians', union bosses' and other lobby groups' claims spoiled companies' desire to invest in jobs and production capacities and forced them into risky financial speculation. A stock market crash, they usually argue, has to be understood as a necessary correction of speculative manias. Sounds a bit like Freudian psychoanalysis, doesn't it?

According to this view the human desire to maximize profits, Freud's id, has to be kept under control by market forces playing the role of the super-ego. Our economics explorer may be confused; economic pundits that present themselves as materialized knowledge and reason present humans as completely driven by desire, leaving no room for the self-confident ego. Moreover, aren't there desires beyond the pursuit of profit, did Eros turn from the love to other humans to the love of money? Moreover, who are these market-forces? Like puppeteers who only on rare occasions lose control over their marionettes they seem to run the economic show. After a while our economic explorer will leave the newsstand without any answers but a number of new questions. Dedicated to get them answered she may go so far to enrol in university or college classes and read economics textbooks.

Keynesianism: Kind of an Alternative

There she will hear and read about supply and demand, market equilibrium and the distorting effects of political intervention. However, it's the same story she already got from talking heads on radio and TV and from economic journalism, just presented in more fancy terms on campus. Different linguistic styles for an unchanged content still leaves the question of what market forces actually are unanswered. The seeming unwillingness of journalists and professors to answer regular folks' questions, at least not in an understandable language, creates the impression that they aren't educators but preachers. The different linguistic styles used by journalists and professors actually resembles the division of labour between high priests and lay preachers in the Catholic Church and leads us to think that economics is actually not a set of ideas that helps us to understand the world, and possibly change it according to our wishes, but a religion that wants us to accept the world as it is.

If it is true that economics nowadays is an apologetic religion it has gone full circle. Originally it was part of the European enlightenment project in the late 18th century that considered religion as an ideological veil over feudal exploitation and oppression, which enlightenment thinkers sought to replace by an equal and harmonious society based on the natural law rights of each individual. Liberalism, comprising political and economic philosophies, in those days was a rallying cry of merchants, craftsmen and peasants, often referred to as "the people", against the worldly power of feudal masters and the ideological power of Catholic and Protestant Churches. Since that time a minority of the former "people" have developed into a new powerful class; the owners of large companies and financial wealth. To find and justify their way to the top of a different, now capitalist, society, they used economic liberalism in ways similar to those used by feudal masters' use of religion. Liberals argued that the divinely ordained order of the past thus had been replaced by the modern world of opportunity, which is governed by market-forces. The difference between the God-given and the market-given orders is that in the former every individual was born into a certain social position within feudal hierarchy whereas in the latter everybody is free to position himself. Everybody, the economics gospel goes, has the chance to get on top if he or she only works its way up the social ladder. The happy few who are born into power and wealth are considerably less mentioned in that litany.

Unfortunately our economic explorer feels totally lost now. Equally unhappy with economic journalism and economics professors, an offstage voice, the author of this text, tells her something about enlightenment, religion and liberalism. Without losing her nerve it suddenly occurs to her that she might not be the only one who tries to find out why there is financial talk in the media all of the time and crises spectacle some of the time. But where can these other explorers be found? Among unionists? Maybe the economic-religious complex of mass media, university departments and business leaders either ignores or presents them as a distortion in an otherwise perfect market because they host dissenting views beyond the economic gospel.

If you happen to work in a unionized workplace it should be pretty easy to find out whether unions can answer your questions about economics. Ask a shop steward, look up your unions' publications or web site and find out about their educational program. Things are more difficult if your workplace is not unionized because then there's nobody who has a mandate to educate workers. If you are lucky, you or one of your co-workers has heard about Labour Studies Programs offered by some colleges and universities. But beware their economics component. Often the economics departments of institutions that run Labour Studies Programs deliver those classes and you may remember that our economics explorer was actually looking for something different than business-minded economics. This reliance on economics departments, which are clearly part of the economic-religious complex, indicates the low priority Labour Studies gives to economics in general and the promotion of dissenting views in particular. The same is actually true for union delivered education. You can ask your union for classes or information materials on economic issues, but you won't get very much.

In fact, Labour Studies as much as union education has a strong focus on legal issues like organizing and bargaining rights, grievance arbitration and the right to go on strike. The concentration on labour law in education is a direct outcome of unions' core business, which actually is to win recognition as a bargain unit, get a collective agreement and enforce it. The content of collective agreements clearly deals with economic issues, among which wages, benefits, working time and working conditions are the most important ones. However, the dispute between unions, or workers in general, and companies about wages, hours and other issues takes on the legal form of a contract. These legal forms also beckon back on the bargaining process. If there is no right of workers to organize, it's almost impossible to act as a group. There were, and still are, attempts of workers to pursue common goals in the absence of legally recognized unions. However, they are very hard to maintain since the workers who are involved risk persecution for engagement in illegal activity. If unions are recognized, but only on very unfavourable terms, they will still have difficulties in winning good contracts. For this reason, unions' are not only focusing on the application of actually existing labour law but also advocate more favourable legal rights, which, in turn, could help them to organize more workers and win better contracts. Thus they become political players beyond individual workplaces.

Unions' reliance on labour law and political lobbying also impacts the view that most union officials and staff take on economic issues and thus their educational efforts, no matter how little these are, in this field. Their view is certainly different from the free-market gospel promulgated by the economic-religious complex and thus our economics explorer might eventually get what she wants. The economic self-image that dominates unions does not see generous labour law and collective bargaining as a market distortion. Quite to the contrary those things are seen as political complements that are necessary to stabilize a market-driven economy. This perception rests on Keynesian economic →

theory according to which the individual pursuit of profit leads to idle production capacities because companies, who see wages exclusively as a profit-belittling cost-factor, aren't paying their workers enough to make them busy consumers. However, if labour law enables unions to win higher wages, workers' incomes, and thus their consumer demand, will go up. Therefore, Keynesian economists conclude, a politically regulated market economy creates a true win-win-situation. Although companies have to pay higher wages than in an unregulated market-economy they make higher profits because the full utilization of their capacities allows them to sell more stuff than in a situation of lack of demand and idle capacity. At the same time workers enjoy higher wages and some who were unemployed before will happily go back to work.

This sounds much better than the hate-speech the economic-religious complex uses to denounce unions and political intervention in the economy, our economics explorer thinks while she is taking a union class on Keynesian economics. However, she has second thoughts why such great ideas aren't applied to reality. Are business leaders so prejudiced against unions that they can't understand that they would actually benefit from supporting generous labour law and paying higher wages? Or did they never hear about Keynesian economics? It's difficult enough to find even this alternative to free marketeers.

However, it could also be argued that the anti-union hate-speech is not an expression of pathological aversion or a shrill veil over a lack of knowledge among business owners, but part of a conscious strategy that is meant to discredit Keynesian ideas, political regulation and collaboration between bosses and unions. But why wouldn't they take the chance to make more profit through the pursuit of such corporatist policies? For rational calculating business men shaking hands with union leaders and their social-democratic friends should be a price worth paying if it allows to make more money. Why don't they do it? Time is over before this question can be discussed in the Keynesian economics class. Never mind, our economics explorer ponders, I know that there is more than one way to think about economics, I may find an answer to that question for myself. To do so she tries to see the world through the eyes of a business owner. This is not so easy for someone how has to follow bosses' orders on the job, is talked into passivity by the mass media and never encountered the fat cats personally. Thus, her "business imagination" starts with being just a small business owner like the guy who runs the corner-store in her neighbourhood. This isn't too difficult because she talks to the guy occasionally and thus knows that he is scared of going bankrupt because a big mall might open close by and customers, especially if they don't have much money due to unemployment or poorly paying jobs, might flock to the new box-stores. She feels sorry for the guy, but it also occurs to her that an economic crisis would actually help the owners of big stores taking over customers from little corner-stores.

As much as crises help big companies to take over smaller ones in the retail-sector, they do so in any other economic sector. Therefore the owners of big companies, who have sufficient fi-

ancial reserves to make it through a period of low revenues, are actually quite happy when a crisis pushes smaller companies towards bankruptcy because they can't make it without a certain sales volume on a day-to-day basis.

What is more, economic crises come with increasing levels of unemployment so that even workers who have jobs are in fear of losing them. Under those circumstances workers need strong unions that can prevent wage cuts and job loss much more than they do in a booming economy; but, due to the fear of job loss, they will also be much more cautious to advocate unionism or any other claim against their bosses. Thus, companies large and small use economic crises as a means to discipline their workers. Full employment, they think, would encourage workers to ask for ever-higher wages and shorter hours that couldn't be paid out of increasing turnover but would eventually lead to a profit-squeeze.

Companies' onslaught on incomes and working conditions during a crisis could be avoided if unions could build sufficient organizational strength during an economic upswing that would allow them to fight back once the boom turns to bust. However, unions' reliance on labour law and their advocacy of Keynesian policies that had to be conducted by the state do not help to mobilize their actual membership or other workers who might be drawn into the unions through more rank-and-file based activity. In terms of the style of policies they imply, free-market liberalism and Keynesianism are actually quite similar. In the first case the show is exclusively run by top managers and company owners, in the latter case this exclusive club of deciders would be extended by union leaders and state officials; workers' involvement isn't on the menu in either of these.

By the end of the day our economics explorer concludes that Keynesianism is a good idea to solve the economic problems of wage pressure and unemployment but also that bosses don't like it because it may eventually lead to a profit squeeze. She also thinks that it doesn't really matter whether it's a good idea or not, as long as there is no way to build powerful unions that have a chance to put this or any other idea into practice. She also notices that her original question about the causes of financial crises has been replaced by a concern to build a movement that can defend the working and living conditions of workers even under difficult circumstances such as an economic crisis. But that's a question for another day.

The answer is in the question

If Keynesianism is a kind of alternative to free marketism, but has only little chances to be tested in reality because of a lacking social base, the formation of such a base is at least as important as the elaboration of new ideas. Workers' day-to-day experience on the job, but also when they look for jobs, seems to be a good starting point to develop an understanding of economic issues that doesn't treat the majority of people, who happen to be workers, as passive spectators. Taking these experiences serious actually leads to questions that are different from those raised by liberal or Keynesian economics. Those two are concerned with



"IT IS THE WORKER, NOT THE CAPITALIST, WHO PRODUCES WEALTH!" NANCY GASPED

the pursuit of profit. The only disagreement they have is whether this requires an unregulated market economy or corporatist top-level agreements among the leaders of businesses, unions and governments. Management talk about empowerment or Keynesian talk about workplace democracy shouldn't be taken too seriously, neither Liberalism nor Keynesianism is really concerned with workers' experience and ideas because their respective models of society are either governed by the market - another word for big corporations - or an assembly of economic and political leaders, not by ordinary people.

When she finds out that the answers she got to her questions at the union educational were not totally convincing and that she was now asking different questions our economic explorer thought she was back to square one. However, at some point labour movements and working classes were mentioned at the union hall and that reminded her of her grandparents who were with the Communist Party during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Did they know about class and class struggle? Maybe she finds some educational materials in the attic where lots of old stuff is sitting. And maybe that offers an approach to labour education that is more geared towards the rank-and-file than current union officialdom. Luckily, she finds an old pamphlet on Workers, Wages and Profits. Let's see what it says.

It starts with a sharp distinction between workers and bosses and argues that the former depend on the latter. Having no other source of income, workers have to find somebody who pays them for their work. Bosses are in the position to either hire, or not hire, workers because they own all the factories, stores and offices. Ownership of the means of production gives them not just control over their own property but also over the workers they hire and the commodities made by those workers. That really is different from liberals' focus on markets and Keynesian concerns with the political regulation of markets. For the first time since she tried to find out about economics our economics explorer's attention is drawn to the production process. She was already wondering why those other economists talk about the market exchange of commodities but never say a word about the origin of those commodities, let alone the workers who make them. Her pamphlet calls them direct producers because they actually make everything but can neither decide which kinds of things they make nor which production technology to use. Those decisions are made by the owners of the means of production, called capitalists in the communist pamphlet. They are also the guys who sell the commodities, which they haven't made themselves, for a profit. Everything workers produce become commodities because their production →

is sold, no matter whether it has use value as food, cloths, or anything else somebody might need or want.

Compared to today's prevalent business-speech about markets, investments and returns, terms like workers, working class, means of production and capitalists are quite unfamiliar and that's enough to suspect them to be ideological. Fair enough, in some history classes you hear about the Communist Party and their role in organizing millions of workers in the 1930s' Great Depression. But then they miraculously disappeared from public perception in the 1940s, the time when unions eventually won legal recognition in Canada, and recurred in the media rarely. If they did appear they were presented as Soviet spies, Moscow's fifth column or some other evil.

Suddenly questions beyond production, markets and profits come to our economics explorers mind. What did those Commies do wrong in the 1950s? Why was their existence since then either kept secret or presented as a threat to prosperity and liberty? And why don't you get answers if you ask about them? She remembers that she had somehow heard about her grandparents' activity in the Communist Party but it was never talked about how and why that ended. This part of her family history was half taboo and half forgotten.

During the post-war boom her family, as so many others, was busy to leave the grandparents' proletarian past behind. When times got tougher since the 1970s, due to the recurrence of mass unemployment and the spread of precarious jobs, they were trying to maintain a standard of living that would distinguish them from the new proletarianism that became visible in some declining neighbourhoods. There was neither time nor sympathy for 1970s' protestors who claimed that the end of prosperity had put class struggle back on the agenda or articulated concerns about ecological limits to economic growth. But isn't it ironic, our eco-

omic prospector wonders, that there has been a wave of protests and strikes in that decade when the social safety net was much tighter than it is today. Shouldn't we see much more labour activism these today, where even workers in decently paid jobs can't be sure to keep those jobs?

True, today's economy hasn't collapsed as it had done in the 1930s and poverty levels are still lower than they were back then. However, other parts of the world look pretty much like the world that is described in her old Communist Party pamphlet. If I don't let myself be scared off by an unfamiliar language and the vitriolic representation of radical labour organizations in the media, the economics explorer muses, I might learn quite a bit from the Marxism that is advocated there. Isn't it true that only a minority of people is born into a rich life and that the vast majority has to perform wage-labour to make a living? Yes, considerable numbers of workers work hard, study and save to either get into well-paid middle-class professions or start their own business. However, even these ambitious workers need a little luck to reach their goals. And most workers stay within the ranks of the working-class into which they were born anyways. Thus, our economics explorer concludes, the Marxist focus on workers, capitalists and the conflict between these two classes is a good starting point to come to terms with current economic developments.

In fact, financial crises, her original concern, can be explained in Marxian terms' as the result of speculative investments that occur once capitalists can't find profitable investment projects in the real world of commodity production. They don't find these projects because the profit-driven rationalization of the production process leads to the replacement of wage-claiming workers by super-productive machines. However, it often turns out that these machines are very costly compared to the productivity increases they yield. Against all intentions, the profit rate might even fall due to investment in expensive technology. Moreover, wage cuts that lower production costs may also reduce profitable investment projects because they lower workers purchasing power. As a result of lower wages, companies may be able to produce cheaply but they might not be able to sell everything they produce. All these aspects lead the wealthy towards financial speculation, which promises to increase their wealth directly and without the impediments of cost-factors such as wages, machines and technology or demand-factors such as lack of solvent customers.

At some point, however, some investors realize that their expected capital incomes exceed the surplus value produced by workers (realized through sales in commodity markets) which is the ultimate source of dividend, interest, or rent payments. Once this is the case they will start selling assets, eventually triggering a panic in which most shareholders try to liquidate their assets. This is the financial crisis our economics explorer was hearing about in the news. Eventually she got a pervasive answer on her question as to why financial crisis hit capitalist economies.

Admittedly, the starting point of Marxian economics, conflicting interests between workers and bosses, was not only convincing but also promised a rather easy explanation of issues such

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as financial crises. In the course of actually studying the causes of such crises, she had to realize that Marxism is as difficult to understand as any other social science. Because she found the line of argument convincing such difficulties didn't bother her, sometimes she even saw them as a challenge that inspired her to keep on studying.

However, something else started to bother her. Although she found the distinction between workers and bosses a useful starting point, she became increasingly irritated when arguments that were sophisticated in some respects - for example in terms of differentiations between industrial, merchant and financial capital - treated workers as a rather undifferentiated and passive group. This was the case in her old Communist Party pamphlet as well as in much of more recent Marxist literature. Workers have not only different jobs and qualifications but also individual identities, whose expression mixes languages of class with languages of gender, nationality, religion and other factors in many different ways. The concept of a working class loses much of its potential persuasiveness if it skates over the differences in the self-perception of actually existing workers as opposed to the theoretical concept of the working class.

Moreover, our economics explorer remembers that originally she was not just interested in the causes of financial crises but was also annoyed by the media treating her like a passive receiver of infotainment. Studying Marxian economics was certainly not particularly entertaining; but she found it quite informative and sometimes even thrilling. However, she still feels like a passive receiver. On the other hand, her suspicion that something's wrong in a world of overabundance for some and misery for many was constantly fed through her explorations in Marxian economics.

Therefore her interest changed from understanding economic issues to actually changing the economy and thus she is now not only looking for convincing analysis but also for ideas that can guide any such changes.

However, the political implications she finds in her Marxist study materials are rather meagre. Where political action is addressed directly, as in her old Communist Party pamphlet, workers are asked to join and follow the party. That's actually not very different from her experience with union education. Whether I follow a party or a union leadership, our economic explorer grumbles, doesn't make much difference to me. Either way, the rank-and-file is just the entourage of an enlightened leadership. Such demotivating politics are avoided in more recent texts. Mostly produced by academics, this Marxism either offers no political perspectives at all or makes an explicit argument why the power of the bosses is so pervasive that workers, as much as any other oppressed and exploited group, have no chance to change their fate. That is of course even more discouraging than the Communist Party's or union's praise of leadership, which at least implies the hope that the rank-and-file might eventually reclaim and democratize these organizations. Never mind, our economics explorer concludes, Marxism at least helped me to get the questions right, it even gave me a few answers. Equipped with these theoretical tools I can find answers by myself if I apply questions that I have to my actual experience. If I can find a few like-minded co-workers or friends to explore our experience through Marxian lenses we may even be able to move from exploration to political activism. **R**

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CUPE's Agenda for Change: Forward in Struggle, or Backward to Complacency?

Dan Crow

The 2007 CUPE National convention (October 14 – 19) proved to be something of a barnburner as the conflicts between the leadership of the Ontario Division (OD) and the national executive officers broke into a rank and file revolt. The disputes between the OD and the National are longstanding, revolving in part around issues of resource allocation, and in part around issues of principle and the fight over the direction the union should take. But when the National Secretary-Treasurer, and others on the National Executive Board (NEB) helped kill a resolution that would pro-

vide access to the union's strike fund to locals that are legislatively prohibited from striking, rank and file members from Ontario chose sides in the dispute, and spontaneously walked off the floor.

Development of an Internal Battle

Some background on the dispute is in order. That the OD and the National have been at odds has been openly visible since, →

at least, the passage of Resolution 50 at the 2006 OD convention. This resolution, which despite the controversy that followed was actually quite modest, called for the Israeli state to end its apartheid policies against Palestinians and to live up to UN resolutions condemning such practices. The resolution garnered near unanimous support (with one noticeable vote against, and some abstentions), but was publicly repudiated by the National leadership. Rather than take a firm stand, Paul Moist (National President) condemned all acts of violence, specifically identifying Palestinians as co-culprits. Such contradictory statements did not go unnoticed by the right-wing media, and were used to try to undermine Ontario's stand.

The conflict between the two sides was intensified early in 2007 when the National leadership of CUPE entered into negotiations with its staff unions. The majority on the NEB (excluding the representatives from Ontario) insisted on putting concessions on the table. The hard-line position taken by the NEB, in violation of CUPE's own constitution and the basic union principle that concessions are destructive to the movement, eventually led to a short strike by the union's staff.

As significant as these principled disagreements are, we should not lose sight of the fact that there are institutional and administrative issues at play here too. The OD wants more resources allocated to Ontario, including more staff. The Ontario leadership also wants greater representation on the NEB. Currently roughly 42% of CUPE works in Ontario, but only 17% of representation on the NEB comes from Ontario. These imbalances limit the potential of CUPE Ontario to act as the political voice of the union in this province, and certainly limit the ability of the Ontario leadership to push the National union in a more progressive direction.

Friction between the two sections of the union broke out into open hostility at the 2007 CUPE Ontario convention in Windsor. The internal debates over the *Agenda for Change* and the proposed per capita increase were certainly important, and helped define the convention in important ways (see *Relay* issue 18, July/August 2007 for a discussion of the convention). Equally telling of the state of the union was the thinly veiled exchanges between the Ontario leadership and National officers, each taking pot shots at the other in order to win support from the floor. In fact, delegates actually booed Moist over the staff strike when he addressed the convention. Post-convention attempts to find a working relationship between the competing leaderships led only to weak promises of compromise.

Showdown at the CUPE National Convention

That compromise was unattainable became evident at this year's National convention in Toronto. One point of contention was the restatement of the National officers' position on Palestine in the strategic directions document that was to be debated by delegates. Inclusion of this weak position was clearly intended to undo CUPE Ontario's work on Resolution 50, and to do so on the OD's home turf. Other problems clearly came to the fore in the

week leading up to the convention, and during the convention itself. Ontario's representatives on the resolutions committee and the constitutional committee were clearly alienated from members from the rest of the country, and proposals that came from Ontario were disproportionately brought back with recommendations of non-concurrence – a virtual death sentence for resolutions.

Two debates on the floor of convention are of particular importance. The first was a proposed constitutional amendment that would add four new regional vice-presidents (RVP) to the NEB (one from Quebec, one from BC and two from Ontario, doubling these provinces existing compliment of RVPs). The resolution was intended to deal with recommendations of the Women's task force established at the 2005 National convention, which was created to address the longstanding and widespread under-representation of women in leadership roles in the union. According to the proposed amendment, those provinces with multiple RVPs would be required to have at least half of these positions reserved for women. From the perspective of the Ontario leadership, and a great number of delegates from Ontario, this resolution had the dual purposes of addressing women's under-representation and Ontario's marginality on the NEB. After a standing vote, it was clear that more than 50% of delegates were in support, but the resolution did not make the 2/3 majority necessary for a constitutional amendment. Part of the reason for the failure of the amendment was the fact that a sizeable minority from Ontario voted against it, a sign that insufficient mobilization around the issue was done. Perhaps, with greater information flow, mobilizing and grass roots involvement in the build up to convention it would have been possible to bring more of those 'no' votes on board.

The second major resolution defeat came on the Thursday afternoon of the convention. Hospital unions in Ontario put forward a resolution that would grant access to the union's strike fund to those locals that are without the right to strike. Such funds could be used for political action to put pressure on employers. Much as other resolutions from Ontario, this came back from the committee with a recommendation of non-concurrence. There was a great deal of heated debate on the floor, with a large number of Ontario delegates arguing for greater access to the strike fund, and delegates from the rest of the country, and a number of NEB members (including Claude Genereux, the National Secretary-Treasurer) arguing against opening the fund. Apparently there was fear in the minds of some that the \$28 million strike fund would go bankrupt if more locals had recourse to it (even though all locals, regardless of their legal right to strike, pay into the fund!). When the question was called, a majority of delegates endorsed the committee's recommendation of non-concurrence, killing any hope that the union would open its fund to help locals in precarious bargaining positions.

Defeat of this resolution led to a spontaneous walk-out by at least 80% of the delegates from Ontario. The move came from rank-and-file members of the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU), which sponsored the resolution. As the members of OCHU filed off the floor, the majority of Ontario followed in soli

parity – and in this case, the leaders followed the stand taken by the rank and file. An emergency caucus meeting was held immediately after the walkout, at which it was decided that a second meeting of the Ontario caucus was necessary. A meeting was scheduled for Friday morning at 8:45 a.m., roughly coinciding with the opening of the last day of convention. Again, roughly 80% of Ontario’s delegates absented themselves from the floor, leaving a gaping hole on the left side of the room. At the meeting delegates voted to walk off the floor again after OD President Sid Ryan addressed the convention from the floor. A short exchange between Moist and Ryan clarified in the minds of Ontario delegates why they were walking off, which they did en masse. Convention barely held quorum to pass the weak strategic directions document (barely amended after 3 hours of debate and discussion from the floor), and then broke before noon.

A great deal is at stake here. At the highest level, this dispute is about what CUPE will be – either a relatively progressive one (as articulated in the OD’s *Agenda for Change*, and support for Palestinian workers through its Resolution 50), or the business unionism of the administrators at the NEB. More immediately, the dispute will have a real impact on union policy. Will CUPE fund and back political and other nominally illegal strikes, as it has in the past? Or will it fall in line with recent trends to back away from the use of the strike weapon? Will we take a progressive position on international solidarity, or revert to, at best, official ties between labour leaders at the international level? Over the next months, members will have to answer a modified question posed by trade unionists; which side of CUPE are you on? **R**

Whither CUPE?

Dan Crow is a St. Catharines-based CUPE activist.

The fight between the OD and the NEB poses an interesting opportunity for activists in CUPE, related in a fundamental way to the CUPE debate in the July/August 2007 issue of *Relay*. What do activists do in a union with a relatively progressive leadership, but which also needs to be internally democratized and facilitative of member activism? Although still tied to an overly optimistic social democratic orientation (as evinced by its virtually unconditional support of the NDP in the recent Ontario election), the leadership of the OD is still amongst the most progressive in the country (note the *Agenda for Change* passed at the OD convention in May). But there are also clear signs that the leadership needs to open up the union to the activists; allow committees greater capacity to develop and implement strategic plans; create more regular and more meaningful two-way flows of communication between locals and the executive; end the practice of the most senior officers of the OD making decisions and expecting the entire union to support them without allowing for debate and democratic control over the process and outcomes. The feud between Ontario and the National provides activists in this province the opportunity to press for the kinds of democratic changes that are necessary to building a progressive and inclusive union. Support for the progressive leadership can (and should) be given in order to maintain a bastion of the left within CUPE National. But such support must be matched by the leadership’s willingness to open up and democratize the OD.

From out of our PAST
Stuff they don't tell you!

NATIONAL DAY OF PROTEST

Day of protest empties workplaces

By October 14th 1976 the Trudeau government's wage and price controls were a year old. Targeting workers' wages more than prices, they were brought in to "wrestle inflation to the ground", but after 2 years inflation had climbed to 9 per cent. In an era of rising inflation caused mainly by the Vietnam war, unions had finally made real gains in wage increases and working conditions. These gains were deeply threatening to the business class which found that they could blame inflation on the unions. The federal government acted by passing legislation on October 14th 1975 that unified workers across the country. A year later one million workers walked off the job in a national day of protest in a powerful act of defiance and solidarity.

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1976: Although wage controls didn't control inflation, they did attack workers. High interest rates finished the job by inducing the '81 recession.

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Union Art Service

Unions Cannot Afford More Magna-type Deals

Sam Gindin

The newly announced deal between Magna and the Canadian Auto Workers reflects a trade-off: The CAW gets in and Magna gets the kind of union it wants. Magna, it should be noted, has now surpassed even General Motors as Canada's largest and most successful employer in the auto industry. It is evident from previous CAW attempts at trying to organize Magna that its workers need a union. They also have a right to a union, one that has been frustrated over the years by Magna's interventions to prevent unionization.

The CAW left the American international union in the early 1980s over how close the U.S. leadership had gotten to the companies and how far they had strayed from the membership. The new Canadian union did not then have much appeal for Frank Stronach, Magna's founder and chief officer. The CAW today – made desperate by a loss of jobs and with a president seemingly ready to declare victory no matter the scale of the concessions – gets Stronach's stamp of approval.

Anticipating criticism, the CAW has asserted that this agreement is not a tactical retreat but a "bold" step forward that contains "all the features of a high quality collective agreement." Not so. The CAW has embraced the Magna model and thus given up what workers have historically fought for, above all the need for independent unions as a counterweight to the power of the corporations that employ them.

At the time of the fight for union rights in Quebec in the 1950s, Pierre Trudeau said: "In the present state of society, in fact, it is the possibility of the strike which enables workers to negotiate with their employers on terms of approximate equality." Indeed, given management's control over production, the possibility of a strike is the minimum condition for workers bargaining some of the conditions of their lives. The CAW now stunningly commits itself to disposing with that right forever at Magna. It also accepts the language of "we're all in this together," even while Magna pays wages that have undercut the rates won in CAW collective agreements with other corporations while Stronach has, over the past three years, paid himself a total cumulative salary of more than \$100 million.

In the Magna model, there are no shop stewards. This crucial element in union democracy, whereby workers elect one of their own in each department of the workplace to deal with management, has no place here. The deal with Magna allows instead for a singular "employee advocate" to cover the whole plant. It is not yet clear how they will be selected but this will involve a plant committee on which managers have half the seats. "Troublemak-

ers" – those who challenge the status quo and stir up the members – need not apply.

In this context, it's hard to see how the union will carry out its responsibility to Magna workers, but not at all hard to see how the deal with Magna will negatively affect workers in other places. What auto company won't turn to its union and say: "If giving up the right to strike and elect shop stewards is what you are prepared to do for one of Canada's leading companies, why not do this for us? And if competitiveness is accepted as the bottom line for them, why not for our corporation?" Indeed, CAW president Buzz Hargrove has already publicly offered a similar deal to General Motors in any new plants it establishes in Canada. What government, facing union criticism for limiting the right to strike or introducing back-to-work legislation, won't smugly hold up the Magna deal as justification?

So why, other than the new dues it will collect, did the CAW move in this direction? Some would argue that this is where the union has been heading for years, gradually departing from what made it famous in North America in the 1980s and 1990s when it identified its ultimate strength as its capacity to mobilize its own members, and to act in solidarity with social movements. Rather than keep up its pressure on the Big Three to not deal with suppliers that oppose unionization drives, rather than devote adequate resources to involve young activists in those drives in their own communities, it has now encumbered itself within the Magna model. Perhaps this is not surprising from a CAW president who personally campaigned for the Ontario Liberal government that ignored labour movement pressure to remove the barriers to unionization the Harris government introduced and to follow other provinces in introducing anti-scab legislation.

Other union leaders, including some of those once rightly chastised by Hargrove for supporting the NDP despite Bob Rae's infamous removal of public sector workers' rights during his social contract, have criticized this deal with Magna. The question is, where are the militants in the CAW – the activists, staff and leaders who know full well what the Magna model means for the labour movement? Where is their outrage? **R**

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This article first appeared in the *Toronto Star* on Oct 26, 2007. Visit www.socialistproject.ca/caw.html to read our numerous reports on the Magna deal.

The Union had a Dream

Jay Johnston

With all the controversy and debate surrounding the recent CAW/Magna Framework of Fairness Agreement, perhaps it would be useful to take a step back and examine the role of unions.

I would challenge anyone reading this article that has ever been active in a union to think of an event that could be viewed as a defining union experience for them personally. Something that inspired you to continue fighting what is usually an uphill battle. Odds are that the event had little to do with wages or benefits. You were probably confronting some form of injustice, righting a wrong. Odds are if you still remember that event, at the time fighting back made a difference.

When you ask workers what they need a union for, most will say 'to stand up to the boss'. Unions spend more time dealing with management treatment of workers than negotiating wages or benefits. Unions have traditionally recognized that the goals, values and needs of workers are often at odds with the goals of corporations. The Framework of Fairness radically changes that perspective. The union willingly accepts the roll of 'enhancing stronger employee participation and commitment in the Magna production process'. In the agreement there is little to ensure workers have a chance to determine what their collective needs are, in fact they have no democratic control over their local union. In every other CAW local the general membership is the highest authority in the local, while at Magna there is no provision to even have membership meetings.



Unions not only counter-balance corporate power, but also counter corporate thought. Greed is balanced by compassion, self interest is countered with collectively fighting for the needs of all, and the logic of the spread sheet is contrasted by the dream of a fairer world. An often over looked role of unions is to inspire workers. When workers believe in an ideal they dare to fight back. When they have faith in their collective power they dream and they take action. Our union has realized many achievements that would have been considered unrealistic seventy years ago, we have turned many of our dreams into reality. That ability to challenge the status quo and change the world is the real reason the Frank Stronach's of the world hate and fear unions.

As a union we have realized our dreams through collective action, both in the plant and on the picket line. The Framework of Fairness makes either form of action impossible. That is why Frank Stronach has done an about face and is ready to embrace the union. He no longer fears us. In our haste to change the Magna workplace we have rendered ourselves powerless to affect any real change.

Some have argued that we didn't give anything up because Magna never had a union or the right to strike. I would argue that we've taken away the chance for Magna workers to dream and in doing so have lost faith in our own dreams. **R**

Jay Johnston is an activist in the CAW.

Ottawa hotel workers exercise their right to strike - and win

Kevin Skerrett

Workers fought hard over many decades to win legal recognition of the right to strike. Most unionized workers now have this right, and most trade unions work hard to defend and occasionally exercise it.

It is, of course, terribly disheartening to feel a renewed need to state the above obvious point, but in the wake of the CAW's new "Framework for Fairness" deal with Magna, the importance of the strike weapon is again a focus of some debate. In this context, a bitter but ultimately successful 26-day strike against the Sheraton Ottawa Hotel last month merits a serious examination.

The culturally (and linguistically) diverse 80-member bargaining unit at the Sheraton Ottawa is composed of kitchen,

dining hall, valet, maintenance and room attendant workers organized since the 1970s as Local 261 of the Hospitality and Service Trades Union. They are an affiliate of UNITE-HERE and also represent the workers at most other major Ottawa hotels. Most of the elected and staff leadership of the Local are women.

According to the picketing workers, the hotel had been a half decent employer up until an ownership change in 1993, when it took on the Sheraton name, and the new Hong Kong-based financial conglomerate owners appointed an especially vicious general manager. Since that time, staffing levels have been gradually eroded from over 160 to around half that number. So, work in all departments has intensified.

At the same time, the employer changed the health benefits plan arrangement from an employer-paid premium to a cost-share, and over time paid less and less of the total bill. When they came to bargain in the summer of 2007, an inadequate wage offer was made worse by a health benefits offer that would have resulted in the employer's cost-share falling to less than 50% of the total. The Local membership had run out of patience and voted overwhelming to launch a strike on September 17, their first job action in more than 20 years.

Under any circumstances, strike action is risky – there really are no guarantees. In this case, with a corporate goliath ownership group based in Hong Kong, the risks were even greater that the hotel's management would have the latitude and resources to hold tight, hire a scab cleaning company and wait it out.

Having hit the bricks, the union quickly demonstrated the depth of their determination. While the active picket duty was taken up by only 60 of the 80 members, not a single member of the unit crossed that picket line to scab. The picketers quickly developed a careful but disruptive tactic of "slowing" the arrival and departure of every single linen bin, car, truck, or other delivery to and from the hotel.

Within a week of picketing, a group of other local trade union and social justice activists formed a Support Committee. The first major "action" of this group



Picketing morale-boosters occasionally broke into song.



A glimpse of the Oct 5. "Picketline Fiesta."



Dozens of supporters boosted picketline strength on Oct 5.

was an October 5 "Picketline Fiesta" – supported by the Ottawa and District Labour Council and an assortment of other sympathizers that boosted the usual 20-member lunch-hour picket to over 80. A pair of popular folk-singers, Teresa Healy and Tom Juravich, sang a great set of labour and picketline classics, providing a jolt of positive energy.

This Fiesta was a breakthrough – the picketing members knew from that point on that the word of the strike was getting out and the support they were attracting was not only boosting their picketline, it was also leading to more and more cancelled hotel bookings. The tide was turning.

Only four days later, word arrived that the Ottawa Chamber of Commerce was scheduled to hold their 150th anniversary fundraising dinner at the Sheraton on October 10th (keynote speaker: the incomparable Perrin Beatty). Remarkably, with just 24 hours notice, the Support Committee was able to use email networks and word of mouth to deliver over 60 supporters to rally at the hotel and establish a vocal and militant "welcome" to the local business cronies arriving to cross the picketline.

With the visible anger and noise of a picketline gauntlet to run, fewer than 50 people went through, and the evening of glitz and champagne had to have been ruined. The highlight-lowlight of the night was the arrival of Ottawa's repugnant Mayor, Larry O'Brien (who refuses to step down in spite of a very serious OPP investigation into criminal bribery allegations). His jaunty wave at the picketers as he went through the doors enraged the crowd and nearly provoked a major confrontation. The shouting and jeers of "Shame on Larry!" reverberated both inside and outside the hotel. Without question, the hotel management was rattled.

The following day, negotiations started up again and by the end of a long evening, the union bargaining team signed a new deal. Two days later, on October 13, a ratification meeting approved the new agreement with an 89% yes vote. In summary, an improved wage deal had been supplemented by a vastly improved cost-share arrangement on the health benefits plan. At the union's victory party following the ratification vote, pints were raised and tributes to one another flowed freely. They had won.

The Sheraton strike offers several key lessons. First, the dispute itself highlights the cruel effects of the last 20 years of

neoliberal attacks, particularly in the hospitality industry: internationalization of ownership, downsizing, work intensification, and cuts to negotiated health care benefits (made more important by cuts to the public health care system). Second, even cautious, "legal" tactics deployed against a high profile service-sector employer can be greatly enhanced by effective outreach to sympathizers in the broader labour and activist movements. The Ottawa and District Labour Council really needs to re-activate a serious strike support committee, as existed in previous years.

Third and finally, the union membership proved, again, that the right to strike really matters not because we want to strike but because it works. Its effectiveness derives in part from the economic pressure imposed on the employer, but no less from the effect a strike can have on the consciousness of the striking workers: the importance of our work to the employer's success is suddenly made obvious to all.

In a climate where only 17% of private sector workers have a union, and a proud union like the CAW is treating the right to strike as a "trade-off" to be dealt away, a courageous group of Ottawa hotel workers has shown that the right to strike – and the ability to win – is as relevant as ever. **R**

Kevin Skerrett is a trade union researcher, active with the Canada Haiti Action Network.

New Zealand Union Succeeds in Organizing Young Workers

Roger Annis

Four years ago, some experienced social and political organizers sat down with young people in Auckland, New Zealand to map out a plan for a novel trade union, one that would potentially represent the thousands of workers that toil in poorly paid and mostly part-time jobs in the fast food and other service industries.

When the group approached existing unions with its ideas for such an organizing effort, it was told, “Not possible,” or “Too difficult.” Most workers in the targeted industries are considered too young and itinerant, or too distracted by consumerism and other vices to think about collective industrial action.

Undeterred, the group launched an organizing drive that would ultimately result in the Unite Union. Today, Unite counts 5,000 members. Of these, 2,000 work in the fast food industry, 600 at the main casino in Auckland, 500 in call centres and another 700 work in hotels. Most of the union’s members are in and around Auckland, New Zealand’s largest city.

Unite is exploring a merger with a larger union, the 20,000-member National Distribution Union. That union is itself undergoing a transformation into a more democratic and fighting organization in the wake of a successful campaign in 2006 to defeat a lockout of 500 workers by the giant Australian retailer Woolworth’s.

I interviewed Mike Treen, National Director of Unite, who told me Unite’s story while attending the Latin America and Asia Pacific International Solidarity Forum in Australia, held from October 11 to 14.

“We had several things working in our favour when we started the organizing campaign. The unemployment rate was low, so it

gave young workers confidence that if things came to worse, they could always move on to another job.”

“We also had several features of New Zealand labour law in our favour. The law requires employers to grant union organizers access to the work site. And union recognition is granted to whatever proportion of a workforce wishes to be recognized. All we needed was a minimum of two workers to sign up and we had our foot in the door.”

Unconventional Tactics

The union quickly realized that it could not win representation by traditional tactics of industrial action, Treen explained. “Our campaign was above all political. We used a combination of on-the-job pressure tactics and mobilization of broader community support to win union representation.”

“Our central demands were one of the main reasons for our success. There were three: abolish sub-minimum wage youth pay rates; a minimum wage of \$12 per hour; and secure hours of work. These demands became very popular, not only among the workers we were organizing but also among their friends and family and in broader society.”

Unite’s organizing work was anything but traditional. “We bought a bus, decorated it with the campaign material and attached big bullhorn speakers. Then we would use it to travel from one worksite to another and mobilize very loud and visible support outside the workplaces where we were organizing or bargaining. Dozens of short strike were held with the young workers making a real noise on the busy highways and intersections where these fast food outlets are situated.”



Treen explained how one company, Restaurant Brands, was organized. It owns Pizza Hut, KFC and Starbucks. “When we launched the campaign, we did it with what we called ‘the world’s first Starbucks strike.’ Because the pizza delivery network had one national call centre, it didn’t require a lot of industrial action to put pressure on the company. We would have a rally outside the call center on a Friday or Saturday night. The call centre workers would come out and take part. Workers could stay for as long as they liked. Some would only stay out for half an hour, some would decide to go home for the rest of the night. The net effect was to back up calls for hours.”

‘Supersize my pay’

The union mobilized unions, workers and cultural performers to support its fight. It organized several big events in Auckland in early 2006 to galvanize support, including a rally on February 12 that filled the Auckland Town Hall and a march and rally through central Auckland in March that drew 1,500 participants.

The union’s fast food campaign adopted the popular slogan, “Supersize My Pay.” It scored some victories in 2006. Restaurant Brands signed a collective agreement that increased wages, moved youth rates from 80% to 90% of the adult rate and contained a clause that protected the work hours of existing staff before new staff would be hired.

This agreement was followed by others at McDonalds, Burger King and Wendy’s with similar conditions as Restaurant Brands.

During 2007, the government was obliged to respond to pressure to abolish youth rates. It decided that youth rates could only last for three months, or 200 hours. With that change, McDonalds did a joint announcement with Unite that they would get rid of youth rates altogether. Other big employers are now expected to follow suit.

The government has also increased the minimum wage by degree and it is expected to reach \$12 an hour in March, 2008. The union movement is now raising the bar to get a minimum wage of \$15 an hour. This would be equal to two-thirds of the average wage, which is the standard set by the International Labor Organization.

“This campaign was a big victory for a radical, campaigning unionism,” Treen concluded. “It proved young people would join unions in their thousands if asked, and if inspired to do so, by a union willing to fight. Not only did it bring notoriously anti-union employers like McDonald’s to the negotiating table, it also forced them to sign a collective agreement and make real concessions.”

“Unite’s story is an inspiring one. If you want to see it in action, you can get a DVD of the campaign called ‘SupersizeMyPay.Com.’ It’s well worth a look.” **R**

Actively Radical TV in Australia has produced a 64-minute documentary on Unite’s struggle. To buy a copy, contact Actively Radical TV, 73-75 Princes Highway, St Peters, NSW 2044,



Australia. Ph (612) 95655522; e-mail: artres@loom.net.au. It costs US\$30 plus US\$10 postage for organizations and US\$15 plus US\$10 postage for individuals.

Roger Annis, a member of Socialist Voice, lives in Vancouver, Canada and attended the Latin America and Asia Pacific International Solidarity Forum in Melbourne.



The Rise of Toronto's Living Wage Campaign

John Cartwright

John Cartwright delivered the following remarks at a Socialist Project forum on "Living Wages Challenge To Neoliberalism," held on February 11, 2007.

Good morning sisters and brothers, glad to be here. I am going to actually walk you through a journey in order to explain the elements of the campaign as it is today. If you just take a snapshot of the campaign today you would have some understanding, but if you also appreciate the past 6-7 years then you can understand the potential that I believe exists with this minimum wage campaign.

An old guy with a grey beard many decades ago said that it was important that the working class not only be a class of itself but also for itself. So at the start of the 21st century the organized labour movement in Toronto has started looking in the mirror and said, 'where are we at, we are still under the yoke of the common sense revolution (CSR), global restructuring, the ongoing adoption of Paul Martin's "the free trade agenda" at the federal level, and we certainly knew and understood as a movement that the elements of the CSR – privatization, downloading so that the local levels of government had to do the dirty work as was Margaret Thatcher's classic strategy, and the erosion of labour rights – those were key elements of the CSR.'

Where did we fit as an organized working class in relation to that? Certainly after the Days of Action we split all over the place and the labour movement in Ontario was almost paralyzed. In Toronto, the Labour council – which had always been the largest labour council in the country and often at the lead of class struggle fights over these years, back to 125-130 years – immediately analyzed what it could do after the setback to the Days of Action and focused on privatization and tried to fight it to whatever degree it could.

The Water Watch Campaign

I came on as President in 2001, coming out of the trades, and we had started seeing that there was an opportunity to perhaps start putting the pendulum back in a small way. Mel Lastman mused out loud that it was important to get private sector involvement in rebuilding our water infrastructure and said that he wanted to create an arms length group that would involve public-private partnerships in water. The public aspects of water in Toronto were worth \$19 billion in 2000.

Of course the issue of water privatization had become a huge thing across the world. A fight in Cochabamba, Bolivia had inspired a lot of people and the issues were evolving rapidly in Eu-

rope as a number of major private water firms were being investigated for fraud, corruption and bribery. I think something like 50 municipal officials in France were facing jail terms for the corruption that was endemic in the water privatization process.

We saw an opportunity to bring together a wide range of people and push back on the water privatization. We created Water Watch Toronto, with all of the leading environmental groups, the building trades (the City of Toronto has collective agreements with a number of the building trades), obviously with CUPE and others, but also with a broader section of our movement: those parts of our movement who are pink unions, who wanted to see the NDP rebuilt after the devastation of the Rae days, were desperate to have a victory to rebuild some sense of purpose for the social democratic project; the public sector unions, whether CUPE or OPSEU, who were desperate to win a fight against privatization; and the Council of Canadians, of course, who have played a crucial role in talking about water privatization. We brought together all those people and were actually able to launch a one and a half year campaign to stop the privatization of water in Toronto. After Lastman's first comments he never again said privatization. Instead he would refer to an 'arms length' organization which would be publicly controlled. But we knew it was the first step in a ten step dance. People in our movement were tremendously enthused and inspired by winning that Water Watch campaign. It was classic.

Two weeks before this thing finally came to a crunch, there was a big public meeting that they had to hold because we forced the issue through our allies in city council. City hall was packed. At one point in time the chair of the committee, who was fronting this thing, got up and said that the meeting was outrageous and that special interest groups like steelworkers were bussing in people for the meeting. That gave us the opportunity to call the question. I got up and simply said, with a bit of rhetoric, "I would like to know, councilor, why you think West Indian and South Asian steelworkers in Rexdale have any less right to talk about the future of water issue for their kids, why construction workers in Scarborough have any less right to care about this, why aerospace workers have any less right to care about this, why public sector workers in downtown have less right to care about this than the lobbyists that are coming at you. And that room of course erupted. People were finally hearing that their rights were equal to corporate rights. We won that.

Two days before that public meeting the Mayor's Assistant came to me and said, 'John you are a great guy, but just get over

it and let's move on.' Two weeks later, at the next city council meeting, he was coming to meet with me to say, 'is this resolution alright?' I am giving you a short story here. It was a tremendous amount of grassroots organizing that took place. It was not just somebody passing a resolution. The steelworkers phoned 500 members to bring them down there. We picked 6 city councilors out of 44, zeroed in on them, organized in their backyards and bombarded them.

Education

Then we had a fascinating public education fight. The Toronto District School Board was split down the middle and doing the dirty work of Harris. They shut down classes; threatening to shut down schools; closed arts, music and shop classes; got rid of the equity classes that they had built for years and years; as well as dumping ESL and African heritage classes. While doing this dirty work, suddenly one of the right-wingers, the president of the Tory riding association in Rexdale, was found guilty of immigration fraud. He was taking a million bucks off of poor people wanting to come to this country. They wouldn't kick him out of office, even though the law required it. We had to organize, take a legal challenge and find a parent who was willing to go and force the Ministry to do the legal requirement to take him out.

Then we had to organize in Rexdale to force an election because they wanted to appoint somebody in his place. The mobilization took the course of us forming a cross-cultural committee - with folks from the South Asian, Latin American, West Indian and Anglo communities - getting together to say 'let's have representation in this city who cares about the issues that are important for immigrant families, newcomers and working class families.' We forced a by-election and won the by-election - and the reason is because we had reached out to all the newcomer communities even though the guy who ended up being a candidate was after two other candidates we had selected but were not able to run. But the process led the community groups to see that there was a partnership here, some honesty, trust and respect, and they decided to go with that person. In that by-election, we went to all the different unions and said that this was a crucial fight. The unions who were not involved in education issues - the autoworkers, the steel workers - booked somebody out to work on that by-election because they understood we were pushing back on the Mike Harris agenda and we could win something here. We won it. Coming out of that was a campaign that then used a majority on school board to actually challenge the Harris government.

Proud Union City

In 2002 we looked at those victories and said it was time to take it to a different place. It was time to move from an opposition to a proposition. The labour movement declared that Toronto was a *proud union city*. What was the significance of this? We were claiming ownership for the elements of the city we wanted to talk about, for the fact that people can live together in harmony coming from different races, creeds and backgrounds; for the fact that our kids can have some form of decent public education; for the fact that public services are still pretty damn good. Somebody designed that. We wanted to say that the decent quality of life for working families was the result of an organized working class.

For those who are not organized, if union organizers talk about signing a card people can say, 'well of course I should be able to sign a union card, this is a union city.' I don't know how many people here have had the experience of direct union organizing; to ask people to put their livelihood at risk. Some of the toughest things anyone can do. In my opinion, nobody can a true leader of the labour movement who has not gone through that personal experience. It is one thing to want to go on strike, to want to go to jail. It is another thing to sit across the table being trusted with the signing of that card. It is a very sobering reality. But that's why we had to have that slogan - *proud union city* - to establish a different sense of place, a different sense of ownership.

In a Labour Day parade 25,000 people marched under that slogan. We then decided to seek out more allies to push back the Common Sense Revolution. We went eyes open into that thing called the Toronto city summit. The summit was a regrouping of elites in the city. They had created a city where you had to step over people on the grates, where education was underfunded and transit had been screwed up. A section of this elite had realized they had screwed up the city. Some were Liberal Party operatives and others were legitimate urbanists. Organized labour went into that with an agenda and we came out of the first city summit with restoring full funding for public education set as the number one issue. It had not been on the agenda at all when we walked into there.

Activists of Colour Conference

In 2003 our council held the first ever Aboriginal and workers of colour conference held by a labour council in this country. →

Over 300 sisters and brothers of colour came together for the first time ever. Why am I saying this is important? Because they are the working class in this city, but a working class who some of our members rarely talk to outside of meetings. The response out of that conference was stunning. People felt that they had died and gone to heaven. There was a room full of people who could talk about issues that were important to them. And the labour movement was giving them that space and saying it was crucial, as white leaders, to make space for activist leaders of colour to fill the gap of leadership in the city's working class.

We thought there would be one conference every two years. But the participants demanded it happen every year. Research was done on the history of the anti-racist and equity work. Some thought it would be traced back to 1967 when the immigration laws changed, but it went back to 1947, when Bromley Armstrong and other challenged racism in workplaces and entertainment places. The conference led to the creation of a video called *Breaking Barriers* as well as a book. An equity agenda was adopted which has guided our labour council and our organized movement since. I can't say enough about how that step of the journey has informed what we are doing on the minimum wage campaign.

Member Outreach

We started getting ready for the 2003 municipal elections because we saw the large emphasis Harris placed on downloading and making local levels of government do the dirty work. We also looked at the history of left municipal campaigns across the world. Where electoral gains are won in large cities – like Torino, Vancouver at one point or time and London – you can drive a social justice agenda. And we decided we were going to do that. A whole bunch of unions who had never been involved in municipal politics were recruited. It was an opportunity to be part of bigger victories, of challenging this corporate agenda and seeing people step up to the plate. We were able to elect David Miller and a number of progressive women councilors – one of whom reminds me I am married to her. 118,000 union members got a letter at home saying that we are not telling you how to vote but here are the best candidates. Over a third got calls from unions backing that up – that had never happened before. Some of the unions were scared about this, but what happened was that the members welcomed the idea that union activists were calling them up about something other than 'vote for me.' There was a tremendously good response – a light bulb went on about how unions could talk to their members. We had just got rid of the Eves government and it was a brand new day.

But there was a lack of money for many for the programs like social housing that we were supporting. We determined that we had to change the discussion very quickly or we would lose the confidence of our members because Miller would have his hands tied. So we went to work and created a public transit for the public good campaign. We understood that if we went for everything it would be scattershot so we focused on the one thing that we knew the liberals were worried about – transit. We created a new

set of alliances, starting with the ones we had established with Water Watch. Environmentalists, immigrant communities and students soon came on board. The TTC were kind enough to give us space on transit vehicles for ads and the CLC kicked in money. We ran an electronic campaign and we were on campuses and workplaces. We were bombarding the premier with 500 emails every day saying that you've got to fund transit. We know this worked for a number of anecdotal reasons. 90 million new dollars were found to make transit viable and people said, 'wow, we can win.'

Strategic Directions

In 2004 we held a conference on 'organizing the unorganized' because we understood what had gone on in the States and there were debates here because of the lowering of union density and unionization levels. If we did not draw attention to this as a crucial obligation of unions we were going to be in trouble. Coming out of that conference we created a strategic plan called *Strategic Directions 2004-2010* and we laid out three objectives for the labour movement in Toronto. The first was to build new leadership of workers of colour, providing the space for this leadership to come forward and give us their wealth of knowledge.

Second was building power for our communities. We had to lend our resources, power and strength to our own members and communities to build power. Our movement has often said that we build power in the workplace. You also have to move outside. When we into the community we can win victories, like an equity agenda for the most multicultural city in the world.

The third objective was organizing the unorganized. Even though it is not properly our mandate, we want it become a catalyst. An opportunity came up very quickly; the Liberals brought in Bill 144 to restore some labour rights that had been taken away by Mike Harris but they only went two little steps forward: card checks for construction workers but nobody else and a stipulation that people could not be fired on organizing drives. We challenged our affiliates to do the kind of campaign that we had done on Water Watch and the transit campaign in order to put pressure on the Liberals to broaden the bill and we came up short. Our movement got stuck. Some people in our movement said that the bill was racist and sexist because it only concerned construction workers. I along with some of my brothers and sisters – not just from the construction trades – found that offensive. Our movement wasn't willing to invest the time, energy and money necessary for a labour law reform struggle.

We took an important step in imagining that labour council has two projects – labour and community services. We hired Faduma Mohamed, a Somali activist who had been involved with us from Rexdale, as new Director of Community Services and said that her mandate was to build power in our communities. We looked at what was going on in our city. There are over a million workers who earn less than \$29,800 a year. There is an obligation on our movement to see how we raise the standards for these million workers.

HOTEL WORKERS RISING!



lifting one another above the poverty line

A Million Reasons

So we set up a framework called A Million Reasons to Take Action – not a campaign but a framework – and in our minds a whole series of campaigns could happen under that framework to effect change – you can't reach one million people through one silver bullet. As the right wing has cut us and cut us and cut us, it will take many different things to rebuild. A Million Reasons looks to those who are working in Toronto, not necessarily earning under poverty wages, but underpaid and undervalued. This is a labour market challenge – we have to raise the standards of a million workers.

We started talking about four pillars of work. The first was the fight for good jobs. If you don't start talking about the jobs that our members and only talk about poor people, workers will ask if there isn't a charity or an agency for that. So we started from where the members were – the fight for good jobs. If you don't start here half our membership won't be behind us.

Then we said that we had to find a way to raise standards. That's how we have always done it and how the Congress of Industrial Organizations did it. We began looking at the strategies needed to do that.

Next we had to put money into organizing. When you ask most unions in this city about organizing, they'll say 'oh, I think there is there is a guy in the provisional office, I just look after grievances.' But they all have family, all have neighbours who need unions. We challenged our members to put money in.

The fourth pillar was to restore the social wage. We used the term very directly. We decided to take that term back for working people and say, 'your programs are not government programs, they were part of the collective and political bargaining that our movement has done for over a century, that is the value we get as working people in the society.' The heart of our social wage is what value we get as working people. We throw that in to chal-

lenge people. The response to that was wonderful from people in the non-union, community and immigrant sectors. They know we are talking about them, not just about defending the public sector and CUPE jobs. We're talking about raising the standards in your jobs. We are recognizing that race and gender are an integral part of the problem of standards. An amazing amount of trust was built through launching this.

In 2005, I went down to the founding convention of Change to Win, the group that left the AFL-CIO. It is crucial to understand the split in that movement. The split was about whether we are going to put resources into organizing – is it politics or is it density, huge questions. Most people don't want to talk about that. In this global economy these crucial questions raise something really important.

From Hotel Workers Rising to Canada Matters

We had to find those places where we could raise standards and the hotel workers gave us an opportunity. Some of you were there in 2005, when we launched the Hotel Workers Rising campaign. Danny Glover came up here, the head of the union came up here, the head of every major union in the city was there along with the community leadership we had invited there. And the concept of immigrant workers rising was to take on global hotel companies by bargaining across North America, including in some cities that had never even bargained before.

We hired on three community organizers and entered into a formal partnership with UNITE-HERE. We talked to all kinds of community organizations, not just agencies, but people that we normally did not work with in a real way before: the Canadian Hispanic Council, Canadian Portuguese Council, the Canadian Tamil Congress and the African Social Development Council. We worked with some faith people but Canada is not the States and we could never get that preponderance of faith leadership. A different kind of relationship developed. →

The object of this was to show that immigrant workers can have a decent life. It was to challenge the companies through contractual obligations to have a training agenda that reached out to young people so kids don't have to grow up choosing gangs, they can actually work... and not in lousy jobs. The components of our coalition built an amazing amount of trust with each other and international agreements were lined up that summer with Hilton and Starwood.

In Toronto they raised the standards in some areas and created training for the first time. It never got the huge celebratory victory that we had hoped for when we started out – but it has incrementally moved things forward and empowered a ton of immigrant frontline workers who were speaking at all the major events in the media. People like Zelida Davis, a Jamaican Canadian who was a teacher back home, who for her first eight years in Canada was ashamed to tell her kids she worked in hotels; a young Filipina sister at the Delta who had been fired for being involved in the organizing; and a young Chinese sister at King Edward who was fired and reinstated after the lobby was occupied. That incredible sense of empowerment was the important feature of that movement.

In 2006 we hired Jojo Geronimo – who in my opinion is one of the finest labour educators in North America – to head up our Labour Education Centre. The center was retooled entirely, giving it a different role by examining how we do class analysis based education work in our movement.

We were challenged on the TTC subway cars as to whether Canadian manufacturing jobs mattered. We rose to that occasion with the Canada Matters campaign. The CAW funded it, it was their jobs, but others stepped on board as well. We got an open letter signed by nine community groups, agencies serving youth, saying that if the city turned its back on jobs they were turning their back on the next generation. And we built very strongly within the Chinese community to make sure that this was not a xenophobic, 'made in America versus you guys' campaign. It was also about jobs for new Canadians. We looked at the social services sector and what was happening in that and started an alliance with social service agencies and unions. So by last summer we had a whole bunch of new relationships and had gained some campaign examples to move forward with from the Million Reasons framework.

The Minimum Wage Campaign

Our executive went on retreat in the summer and asked what we were to do now. The impressive organizing gains of the hotel workers campaign still left us a long way from raising the standards of a million workers. We decided to go after labour law reform and get back the right to organize. Right now people are being fired left, right and centre when they organize. The problem is most of our unions do not see this. When we were wondering how to get people involved in that a miracle happened – Cheri di Novo's private members bill to increase the minimum wage to

\$10. A bunch of Liberals had voted for it but nobody was paying attention. The second miracle was that the Toronto Star had a coup, dumped their editor and publisher and vowed that the Atkinson principle of social justice would once again be their guiding principle. They launched their war on poverty and two editorials supported the minimum wage bill. We had an executive meeting in December and understood that miracles don't happen without a reason and so we decided to jump forward on the minimum wage campaign. Now we were Johnny-come-lately on this. Ontario Needs a Raise (ONR), Ontario Coalition for Social Justice (OCSJ), Workers Action Centre and Campaign 2000 had been doing this for a long, long time. We admitted that. We did have something of value to bring to this though: the understanding of how to reach out and speak to 190,000 people. Our labour council had moved from a small sliver of activists to 101 workers who came to everything, but how would we mobilize 190,000 people?

'I think people have a sense of the pendulum moving back, but the question is, if it moves back is it going to a Bob Raeist place or will our movement, the organized working class, and the broader communities know that it can't just stop there.'

In the fall 2006 elections we moved from reaching 118,000 workers to 145,000 by working with people who had never felt part of the mainstream labour movement – including firefighters and nurses. A much broader section of the working class was willing to become part of a central project because they saw some success happening. So we went to the agencies and said, 'so you guys have done this, we are not going to overshadow it, but we are going to move it forward.' We met with groups like the OCSJ, ONR and the Canadian Federation of Students, with whom we were good allies on our other campaigns.

We made 20,000 flyers right away and met with labour councils across the province – everyone agreed that the campaign couldn't be won by just operating in Toronto. We were quite poor in terms of resources. There was only a couple of political staff and two support staff. When we got some more money we started printing 10,000 buttons.

What are the lessons we have learnt from the past five years? We have to talk to ordinary people in such a way that they understand the organized labour is fighting for them; we have to talk to



John Cartright speaking at a campaign rally.

The fact that politicians give themselves a raise bigger than minimum wage is a glaring example; but Hugh Mackenzie's work that says that the average top CEO gets more by noon Jan 2nd than a min wage worker earns in a year is much more important. If we just talk about politicians we fall into a right-wing discourse. Instead, we want to challenge global capital. Fundamentally it comes to people saying that government should be playing a role other than going along with restructuring; not allowing McDonalds to wipe out all the local restaurants, or Canadian Tire to sell everything, all of which is made somewhere else.

I think as we design this campaign we should ask how we involve immigrant communities, our

the new working class which is mostly people of colour, mostly newcomers, and young people coming out of school; we have got to use our organizational rigour and thoroughness so we can pack a punch; if we stand in Queen's Park with a bunch of signs, that is not as much as 150 constituents of Mike Cole going to his office to ask him about his lack of support; and how do we take that strategic ability to build power the way that politicians understand it and scare them.

The fascinating thing is this – ten bucks is ten bucks – but it symbolizes the entire reality for the working class in the city. I went onto radio station CFRB and people were phoning in agreement. I have never heard social justice agendas being brought forward on CFRB before. People understand one thing: a lot of folks are getting left behind and if it's not them it's their kids. They understand there is no way you can live on ten bucks an hour – it doesn't make sense. It's not just people being left behind but whole communities like south-west York, Mt. Dennis and Parkdale.

We set up six community town meetings (see labourcouncil.ca for a video) with an amazing turnout of people from every kind of background asking how to get involved. We didn't do a meeting of just talking heads – but of people spending the time talking to each other about how to strategize, how to make it real in their neighbourhoods. People understand that the restructuring that has gone on is basically unfair and that the job loss is not just experienced by auto part workers but rather everything we touch is being restructured. People really start to resent the corporate privilege and the ten bucks campaign presented an opportunity to oppose that. After you offshore the jobs, what is left? Service sector jobs at poverty wages. When I am walking around with the ten buck button on people stop me and say 'you're right, they should be doing it.'

leaders of colour, in this process; how we involve youth in this process; and how we roll this campaign out so that there is an educational component – going up and having a chat with people and asking them to be part of this. We need a conversation with rank and file union activists about the meaning of the campaign and a class analysis of what this is about to allow a deepening of the political project so that it is much more than \$10.

The electronic stuff is stunning – in cyberspace the campaign has been taken to Facebook and YouTube with hundreds of people already responding. The buttons are going like crazy. I think people have a sense of the pendulum moving back, but the question is, if it moves back is it going to a Bob Raeist place or will our movement, the organized working class, and the broader communities know that it can't just stop there. What is our place in challenging global capitalism?

I think it is important for folks to understand this is not just a campaign, but a journey where, as a conscious decision, the leadership of the organized labour movement in Toronto says our class cannot be of itself it has be for itself. We have to figure out how to talk about people who have nice comfortable lives in Scarborough and Etobicoke, as well as people who are in high rises in Dixon road and Jane and Finch in order to challenge the obscene corporate power that is taking over in this new age of imperialism. So I will stop there and we can have a conversation. **R**

John Cartwright is President of Toronto and York Region Labour Council.



Measuring the Miller Regime:

Toronto Politics, Unions and the Left

David Kidd

I'm a Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) activist and a City of Toronto worker. It is different viewing the Mayor David Miller regime if you're working for the City than for activists engaged in municipal issues.

Like a number of other unions in Toronto, there has been a change in the political participation of my union over the last ten years. Ten years ago there was a real caution to reach out to our members at election time to either take a stand on candidates or even contact our members at their homes to participate in elections. Now our messaging goes right at our membership in a direct manner, and we say to our members "vote as if your jobs depend on it." The change is due to what happened at the city level over the past years. The Lastman regime went after us in a very concerted way. Lastman was determined to privatize every service and job that we do. He opposed our union and we had two strikes, the first significant strikes in our history and this transformed our union. All levels of the union now understand the need to participate in elections.

The 2006 Election and the New Miller Regime

In the municipal election of 2006 we mobilized our membership, through flyers and phone banking, and we engaged full time organizers in key campaigns. Members actually phoned the union office and thanked us for informing them how to vote. We also selected organizers who lived in the wards they were working in and so we also encouraged a longer-term involvement. Other unions did this as well.

During the 2006 election, key union issues were, again, privatization and also union sourcing of city purchases. This came up around the replacement of Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) subway cars. The TTC was pushed to keep the production in a unionized plant in Thunder Bay and it became a real debate and a number of candidates unleashed an onslaught of anti-union rhetoric during the debate. The red-baiting of the campaign was aimed at CUPE. In the school board trustee campaign there was a claim that CUPE was manipulating the vote, telling people who to vote for, and that it would be a union controlled school board. The *Toronto Star* ran a front-page story to this end.

There was also a similar right-induced attack on Councillor Joe Mihevc, suggesting he was anti-Semitic because he got support from CUPE, who had identified Israel as an apartheid regime. It's interesting that this was the kind of red-baiting in the 2006 election. In the prior election, the *Toronto Sun* had identified now Councillor Paula Fletcher as pro-communist. Even in the sourcing debate, a number of media outlets and a number of councillors claimed that because we wanted to keep the jobs in Canada, we were blocking the free market, and this was leading to a communist dictatorship!

Mayor Miller's politics can best be characterized as one of a U.S. Democrat. He understands what union support is to get elected and he also knows what it is to get corporate support to get elected. The traditional municipal NDPer does not want to suggest they get union support and they are also often reticent about corporate support, though they would love to have it. But Miller is very

clear: he gets corporate support and union support. And he has very strong white middle class sensibilities. I am a Parks and Recreation worker, and Miller supports programs for kids and youth but he is also clear about protecting trees and parks. Middle class residents have shown through polling that they are more concerned that the parks be beautiful than programs be provided. Miller knows that.

The reason why CUPE supports Miller is that he stopped the whole-scale privatization of city services. Miller, being the mayor, was also instrumental in a number of collective bargaining negotiations – both for the CUPE locals at City Hall but also for the TTC workers as well. His regime helped to solve some bargaining roadblocks that former Mayor Lastman and the right on Council have never wanted to resolve. I work in a poor community and Miller's policies have contributed to a shift in the role that policing plays from the confrontational racial profiling of former Police Chief Julian Fantino to the acknowledgement of racism of the police from the Blair regime and the acknowledged need to improve community relations.

A Miller Agenda Against Neoliberal Urbanism?

In terms of setting the agenda in this election, Miller's campaign failed to lay out any clear objectives, giving political space to the right to do so, and maintain their capacity to sustain neoliberal urban policies. John Laschinger was again Miller's campaign manager this time, after spending years working for Prime Minister Mulroney and other Conservatives. Laschinger's strategy was standard mainstream thinking for a candidate seeking re-election as an incumbent and in the lead. Laschinger made sure there was no popular mobilization for Miller in this election, either from progressive councilors or from unions. The election was run on a stand pat formula. The right on the Council and Toronto business, particularly the Toronto Board of Trade and the speculators and developers around the Toronto Real Estate Board, set the agenda in the election and keep Miller on the defensive over the last year in office.

There are a number of criticisms to be made of the positions that Miller has taken from a union standpoint. The most basic one, for me, is that he has set into play a tax transfer over the next 15 years whereby residential homeowners and tenants will be paying an increased share of the current taxes of the business and commercial sectors. This is the most basic sellout that the Miller regime has done an actual transfer of taxes from the rich to the poor. It is completely consistent with neoliberal policy positions of redistribution to the rich and corporations (and this fall's budget fight to increase city revenues is one of the consequences). There are also other issues: a bylaw Miller initiated has contributed to the criminalization of the homeless; he has not championed effectively immigrant or racialized populations; and the problems of the racialization of poverty and violence continue to fester.

There is a funding crisis of the entire public infrastructure. The privateers lie in wait to put forward their agenda to replace aging public facilities and programs with private capital and with

contracts to extract profits. With declining revenues from the province and the federal government, and provincial legislation directing municipalities on how they can finance themselves, the city is facing a funding crisis and limited options as to how to respond. The budget fight and funding crisis, the failures of waterfront development, the continued decline of the TTC: all suggest that even if Miller and his Council allies govern the city, it is the right and business which still rules.

Union and Local Election Dilemmas

CUPE and the union movement were on the defensive during the 2006 municipal campaign. We did campaign on privatization as our touchtone issue. But we need to be self critical as we did not advocate on other issues of the working class as effectively, particularly on the need for a decent jobs at living wages and the racialization of poverty.

In terms of the school board election in 2006, education issues were again treated as less important than municipal issues. Here a neoliberal agenda to gut the school board of basic services and programs has also been forming over the last year. This issue is mostly under the radar but the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has become an institution that does not promote or affirm services to the poor and is moving to a board that increasingly provides programs that the parents have to fundraise for. What was also significant in the 2006 election was that the provincial Liberals targeted the local opposition to this agenda. They went after the independent left-wing trustees who do have party machines to rally support. They put in Liberal party candidates and engaged in red-baiting. Liz Hill, a longstanding Communist Party trustee, was defeated. The TDSB local, CUPE 4400, is facing the decimation of its membership – the administrative support staff and custodial services. Whenever the right wants to cut services, they always go after the low-waged sector first. CUPE 400 will have to develop a well-planned fightback campaign.

A key issue for the left in the municipal election was the divide over the support of candidates of colour and the nomination for councilor process. This was played out initially in the councilor candidate nomination race between Tam Gossen and Helen Kennedy in the downtown ward that had been represented by Olivia Chow. Chow threw her support behind her longstanding white executive assistant, Kennedy. Kennedy won the nomination. Goosen, a long-standing →





and establish a union and progressive agenda for Toronto. Little progress has been made, as a new urban left has not cohered in any way that can claim to map out an alternate political future for Toronto. Some key issues can be readily identified, however.

Unions and the left need to make the dismantling of economic and racial divisions a first priority. We need to campaign on the issues and status of immigrant workers and immigrants. Until the labour movement and the left campaigns openly for the immigrants in the city that group will look elsewhere. Immigrants should be able to vote in municipal elections after they have landed status, and not have to wait until they have Canadian citizenship. The left needs to be the inclusive force. Violence is an issue that impacts hard on poor communities. We have to articulate that from a working class point of view. This is not an issue of putting more cops on the street. It is an issue of defending people's rights to live in a safe environment.

Urban environmental issues are of massive importance. There is a need to mobilize around these, and particularly over plans to implement measures to address climate change, from a working class perspective. Otherwise ecology issues will continue to be framed from a business and professional point of view in terms of market incentives and consumer choices. There is, for another example, a huge problem of gridlock and transit in Toronto. But the environmental movement is locked into a transit strategy that does not respond to how we get there with the infrastructure we have now, and workers' use of their own vehicles to get to work and services.

The continued crisis of affordable housing in Toronto will continue to occupy the left. The federal government cuts are coming and there is no agenda to recreate affordable housing in the city; except for public private partnerships as, for example, the redevelopment of Regent Park. That is the model, but this will not address the housing crisis, and housing will continue to be one of the foremost issues for poor and working class people. The current Council has no clear agenda here, and has been adrift over the issue since the election. The fiscal capacity depends upon governments and political movements at the national and provincial levels as well. But as in so many issues, there is no progressive campaigning leadership that has emerged in Council either.

The working class, poor and immigrants in Toronto, and Canadian cities more generally, are open to being mobilized. The challenge for the urban left and the labour movement is to do so. This is an organizational and political test that goes beyond just getting people to vote for certain candidates. The Miller regime and the current forms of left organization have not yet loosened the grip of neoliberal urbanism on Toronto. **R**

Chinese activist and former trustee had mobilized significant support for her candidacy from the Chinese community in the ward. After the nomination vote, many activists who had supported Goosen refused to support and work for Kennedy in the municipal election. Other municipal activists worked to support candidates of colour elsewhere in the City. Many progressive activists of colour worked for Rowena Santos in the Parkdale area against the Miller-endorsed councilor candidate, Gord Perks. Winnie Ng, a leading municipal and labour activist, put a critical letter in the *Toronto Star*, criticizing Miller's support of Perks, and campaigned for Santos. We were not able to have a dialogue in the union movement during the election or after about these issues.

This issue will not go away. City Council is still quite unrepresentative of the demographics of Toronto. And not all candidates of colour are progressive either. Councilor Michael Thompson, who was endorsed by *Share* in this election, is one. He has agreed with the practice of racial profiling and has typically voted with the right on Council. He may run against Miller next time.

An open and democratic nomination process is one of the ways to go. I've been in wards where candidates for nominations have actually signed contracts before the nomination process that stipulate conditions of the process including deadlines; who can vote and endorse candidates; and the agreed support of all who participate for the person who wins the nomination. We have to figure this out. The right works as a bloc consistently and gets their candidates elected whereas as left constituencies are divided.

Unions and a New Local Agenda for Toronto

Since the municipal election, there is still a need to be proactive

David Kidd is a CUPE activist in Toronto.

The Russian Revolution:



Years After

David Mandel

The October Revolution of 1917 was the most influential political event of the twentieth century. But since history is written by the victors, it is not well known that October was the opening shot of a vast and powerful challenge to capitalism that swept the industrial world and had echoes in the colonial countries. Between 1918 and 1921 union membership and days lost in strikes everywhere reached new heights, while the ranks of the revolutionary wing of the socialist movement swelled.

Revolutions, in which the working class was the moving force, occurred in Germany, Austria, Hungary and Finland. Revolutionary situations (that is, the real, immediate potential of revolution) arose in Italy and parts of France and Poland. In a memorandum to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the British Prime Minister wrote: "The whole of Europe is in a revolutionary mood. The workers have a deep feeling of dissatisfaction with conditions of life as they existed before the war; they are full of anger and indignation. The whole of the existing social, political and economic order is being called into question by the mass of people from one end of Europe to the other."

Canada also participated in this labour upsurge. It experienced a massive strike wave in 1919-1920, including several city-wide general strikes. Most of the strikers went out in solidarity with other workers, a sure sign of radicalization. The Prime Minister of the day later recalled: "In some cities there was a deliberate attempt to overthrow the existing organization of the Government and to supersede it by crude, fantastic methods founded upon absurd conceptions of what had been accomplished in Russia. It became necessary in some communities to repress revolutionary methods with a stern hand, and from this I did not shrink." The Winnipeg general strike became a small-scale civil war, with the federal government arming a bourgeois militia after the police joined the strikers. Nor did the wave bypass the U.S., where union membership doubled to five million in 1916-1920. In 1919, over four million workers, an incredible 20 per cent of the labour force,

struck. That same year 365,000 steelworkers staged the biggest strike the U.S. had ever seen, and a general strike shut down Seattle.

But everywhere, except in Russia, the revolutionary wave was beaten back. This failure was at the root of the subsequent rise of fascism (an anti-worker, anti-socialist movement that everywhere enjoyed the sympathy of the bourgeoisie, and often its material support) as well as of Stalinist totalitarianism. Rosa Luxemburg, leader of Germany's revolutionary socialists, assassinated in January 1919 by proto-fascist troops, correctly assessed the alternatives that faced humanity as "socialism or barbarism."

But if the relation between the failure of the revolutionary wave in the West and the rise of fascism is quite clear, the link with the rise of Stalinism is less well understood.

Russia had two revolutions in 1917, one in February and the other in October. In overthrowing the monarchy and its totalitarian regime in February 1917, the popular masses had no intention of challenging capitalism. This explains why they allowed the liberals, the main party of the propertied classes (that is, the capitalists and nobility), to form the provisional government. The workers' and peasants' goals were: a democratic republic, agrarian reform (confiscation of the aristocracy's land and its free distribution to the peasants), renunciation of the Russia's imperialist war aims in favour of an active, democratic peace policy, and the eight-hour workday.

The various socialist parties, including a majority of Bolsheviks, supported the liberal government. However, Lenin's return to Russia at the start of April soon turned the Bolshevik party around. If he was able to do this so quickly, it was because the party's overwhelmingly working-class rank and file and middle-level leadership had long since concluded from past experience that the propertied classes were opposed to democracy and strongly supported Russian imperialism. According to this view, which the Bolshevik leadership temporarily abandoned in the euphoric days of apparent national unity that followed the February revolution, the revolution could win only if it was led by a government of workers and peasants and in opposition to the propertied classes.

What really was new in Lenin's position in April 1917 (summarized in his famous "April Theses"), at least as far as the Bolsheviks were concerned, was that he now called for a socialist revolution in Russia. He had arrived at this position sometime in 1915, based on his analysis of the world war and the possibilities for revolution that it opened in the warring countries. But in fact, Trotsky, among others on the left wing of Russian socialism, had even earlier concluded a revolution in Russia, whatever its initial goals, could only win if it overthrew capitalism.

From the end of April 1917, the Bolsheviks called for the formation of a government of soviets, councils which the workers and soldiers (the latter being overwhelmingly peasants) had elected in the course of the February Revolution. This would be an exclusively popular government that disenfranchised the propertied classes. This position at first received little popular support. →



It was seen as unnecessarily alienating the propertied classes, who in February seemed to have rallied to the revolution. It would provoke a civil war that no one wanted. (Petrograd's metalworkers, the radical core of the labour movement, were a notable exception. Here, in Russia's capital, some district soviets demanded soviet power during the February Revolution itself.)

But after eight months of inaction and sabotage on the part of the liberal government and in face of the growing threat of a counter-revolutionary military coup aided by a lockout by the industrialists, the correctness of the Bolshevik position became evident to the popular masses. Everywhere they demanded the immediate transfer of power to the soviets. This was done on October 25, or November 7 by the Western Julian calendar, with a minimum of bloodshed.

From that point of view, the October Revolution should be seen as an act of defence of the democratic revolution of February against the immediate threat of counter-revolution. But since this second revolution was directed against the propertied classes, it necessarily unleashed an anti-capitalist dynamic. At the same time, October was more than merely an act of defence. The soviets took power in the hope of inspiring the popular classes in the West to follow Russia's example. This was not simply an expression of internationalist idealism. It was seen as a fundamental condition of the revolution's survival.

As Marxists, the Bolsheviks considered that Russia, a very poor, mostly peasant country, lacked the material and political conditions for socialism. Russia needed the support of developed socialist countries in the West to carry through a socialist transformation. But there were other, much more immediate problems that could not find their solution without the support of revolutions in the West. To begin with, the capitalist states would never accept a socialist revolution in Russia. And, in fact, all the industrial countries (and some non-industrial) sent troops against the soviets and/or financed the indigenous counter-revolutionary forces. They also erected an economic and diplomatic blockade against the soviet state.

The other immediate problem was the peasantry, about 85 per cent of the population. The peasants would support the Bolsheviks insofar as they carried out land reform and took Russia out of the imperialist war, but as a class (especially their better-off and intermediary elements, the latter forming the majority), they were not spontaneously collectivist. Once the land was distributed, they would turn against the workers, who would be forced to adopt collectivist measures to defend the revolution and to ensure their own physical survival.

This analysis was not limited to the top Bolshevik leadership. It was broadly shared by the worker masses, who reacted strongly to the ups and downs of the class struggle in the West. The Mensheviks, who as "orthodox Marxists" had initially refused to support the October Revolution because Russia lacked the conditions for socialism, shared this

analysis too. That is why the majority of the party finally rallied to soviet power once the German revolution broke out in December 1918: revolution in the West had made the October Revolution viable.

Against all expectation, Russia's revolution, which had to organize an army from scratch even as the economy collapsed, survived the onslaught of the capitalist world despite its isolation. This was made possible in large part by the labour upsurge in the West, which limited the imperialist states' capacity to intervene militarily. As one historian explained, "The statesmen in Paris were sitting on a thin crust of solid ground, beneath which volcanic forces of social upheaval were seething... So there was one absolutely convincing reason why Allied powers could not fulfill the hopes of White Russians and intervene with large numbers of troops: no reliable troops were available. It was the general opinion of leading statesmen and soldiers alike that the attempt to send large numbers of soldiers to Russia would probably end in mutiny."

In response to Winston Churchill's urging to send more troops, the British Prime Minister replied that "If Great Britain undertakes military action against the Bolsheviks, Great Britain herself will become Bolshevik and we will have soviets in London." This might have exaggerated the immediate threat, but the port workers' refusal to load arms, the mass demonstrations across the country, the immediate threat of a general strike, and the hint of even more decisive action – 350 local labour councils had been established and awaited only the signal – kept Britain from large-scale intervention alongside France on behalf of the invading Poles in the August 1920. This selfless action by the Labour Party, quite out of character for its generally reformist leadership, is a measure of the times. And it made a direct contribution to the revolution's survival.

The revolution also withstood the hostility of the peasantry, alienated by the Soviet government's grain monopoly and its policy of requisitioning agricultural surpluses and much that was not surplus. But the peasants also understood that the Bolsheviks were

the only force capable of organizing victory over the counterrevolution, which would have drowned the agrarian reform in a sea of peasant blood. For example, a major peasant uprising broke out in the central Volga region in the spring of 1919. A few months later White general Denikin launched a major offensive from the south, counting on the support of the peasants. For the Bolsheviks, this was one of the most desperate moments of the civil war. They tried everything, including repression, propaganda, tax breaks for middle peasants and amnesty for the participants in the revolt. Nothing worked. But the shift came only when Denikin's army drew close to Moscow and peasants saw that the landlords' return as a tangible and immediate threat. At that moment, the insurrection simply died out on its own, and almost a million peasant deserters voluntarily rejoined the ranks of the Red Army.

But the Soviet victory, after three years of civil war and foreign intervention, came at a terrible price: millions dead, mostly from hunger and disease; a devastated economy; a working class, the moving force of the revolutionary movement, bled white and scattered. Along with the revolution's isolation, this was the socio-political terrain out of which the bureaucratic dictatorship grew

and consolidated itself in subsequent years. That is why Stalin, defying Marxist analysis, declared in 1924 that Russia could indeed build socialism in isolation. Among other things, this "theory" served as justification for the subordination of foreign Communist parties to the interests of the Russian bureaucratic elite, a policy that called on these parties to abandon the goal of socialist revolution. The bureaucratic regime, that would soon crush its own working class under the heel of its repressive machine and that would keep it atomized for the next six decades, was not only not interested in revolutions abroad, especially in the developed capitalist countries, but felt directly threatened by them.

Explaining the demand of the factory committees in the spring of 1918 to nationalize the factories – a measure that had not been foreseen by the Bolsheviks in October 1917 – an activist explained:

The conditions were such that the factory committees took full control of the enterprises. This was the result of the entire development of our revolution, the inevitable result of the unfolding class struggle. The proletariat did not advance toward it so much as circumstances led it. It simply had to do that which in the given situation it could not refuse to do.

And as terrible as that may seem to many, it means the complete removal of the capitalists from running the economy. Yes, it means "socialist experiments", as our opponents mockingly say... Yes, we have to say it: that which the working class of Russia has to do is the removal of capitalism and the rebuilding of our economy on a new socialist basis. This is no "fantastic theory" nor "free will" – we simply have no choice. And since it is being done by the working class and the capitalists are pushed aside in the course of the revolutionary struggle, it must be socialist regulation....

Will it be another Paris Commune [the Paris Commune of 1871, the first workers' government, lasted less than two months and was followed by bloody, mass repression organized by the bourgeois government] or will it lead to world socialism – that depends on international circumstances. But we have absolutely no other alternative.

Even ninety years later, it is too early to draw up a definitive balance sheet of the October Revolution from a socialist perspective. But today, when nothing seems to remain of that revolution (only time will tell if that is an illusion), one can at least say: "With their backs to the wall, they dared." The Russian workers launched a bold counter-offensive that held out the chance of victory, rather than opting for impotent defensive tactics that promised certain defeat. Today, when the very survival of humanity is at stake, this is surely something workers can learn from the October Revolution. **R**

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Contradictory Foundation for the Future

Herman Rosenfeld



Review of *The Soviet Century* by Moshe Lewin
352 pages, Verso, 2005

Moshe Lewin has contributed much to the understanding of the experience of the Soviet period in Russian history. Taking a critical approach to traditional ways of looking at the USSR and basing himself on detailed social-historical research, his work has helped to place the period of communism in historical perspective.

This book deepens and further develops a number of themes Lewin has introduced in his previous works, but *The Soviet Century* uses recently available archival materials to both allow “greater insight into the guts of the system” and help the author to challenge some of his previous preconceptions and reveal new issues and problems.

Basic Themes

Lewin’s basic themes – articulated in previous works – come through in this book:

- The October revolution, the final phase of a broader revolutionary period, was the logical outcome of the existing socio-political forces and in many ways was the most progressive outcome. The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Trotsky, sought to create the conditions for the eventual

construction of a socialist society, but this project was stymied by the rise of Stalin.

- Stalin destroyed the party and led a radically different enterprise, a modern form of the traditional Russian effort to use massive state power and autocratic rule to modernize a traditional society – a kind of “agrarian despotism”, masquerading as socialist construction. Stalin’s terror and system of oppression helped to shape the form of that project and was shaped by it in turn.
- After Stalin, the bureaucratic stratum that co-ordinated the vast economic and political structure swallowed up the efforts of political leaders to set policy. Political leadership itself became impossible and dominated by the need to make the system work. Efforts to reform the system were either half-hearted or stymied by other circumstances. Lewin refers to this system as “bureaucratic despotism.”
- The system of central administration of an entire modern economy was by necessity “extensive” and was unable to accommodate the need for “intensive” growth and development;
- While the system unleashed and stimulated vast social transformations (industrialization, urbanization, literacy and cultural sophistication, labour mobility), the ruling stratum was unable to accommodate the needs and concerns of the new social forces created by the very operation of things.

- Eventually, the bureaucracy, corrupt and taking advantage of a grey economy (in itself the necessary outcome of legitimate efforts to make an impossible system “work”), began to act as “owners” of the economic empires they administered, serving as one key element in the new proto-capitalist class that came on the scene after the fall of the system.

Stalin

The first third of the book describes the Stalin period. Stalin – and the system he headed – destroyed the Bolshevik party in a number of ways: killing the central core of Marxists and veterans of the Civil War; transforming the Party into a rigid hierarchy and ultimately, an appendage of the larger bureaucracy that ruled the system.

Lenin and Trotsky realized the impossibility of moving directly towards socialism or complete state ownership of the economy and argued for a period of “state capitalism” to rebuild the economy and build a political base for a socialism. Lewin describes “Leninism”, not as the formal system of party dictatorship, but as a series of principles meant to be applied flexibly, in response the actual possibility of a given context.

Lenin headed a Bolshevik party that had democratic norms, regular debate and sought to apply the principles of socialism to the realities of Russia. With his death and the ascension of Stalin, the party was swiftly transformed. Lewin describes the party of Stalin as representing a fundamentally different departure from Lenin:

“..it involved a clash between two political camps: between what was still “Bolshevism” – a radical branch of Russian and European Social-Democracy – and a new current that emerged from the Bolshevik Party and which would become known by the name of ‘Stalinism’. It was a decisive battle in which the very nature of the new state hung in the balance: either a variety of dictatorship that rejected autocracy and addressed itself to society as it was (predominantly peasant), negotiating with it as it were, or an autocracy that prioritized violence.”

Stalin stripped the party of its inner life and, over time, it ceased to be a party. As Lewin writes, “contrary to the widespread idea that the Soviet Union was ‘ruled by the Communist Party’, it tolled the bell for any political party.”

During the Stalin period and after, the very centralized system itself made it impossible for the party to retain an identity as a ruling party. The nature of the central planning system led to the party’s “economization” – it literally got swallowed up in the task of growing and administering the economy. The history of both the latter Stalin period, and the period to the end of the USSR was characterized by various efforts to deal with this problem, none successfully.

Lewin argues that the wave of bloody purges during the 1930s reflected Stalin’s need to obliterate any proof of his negative role in any past periods. He systematically destroyed the entire stratum of party members and leaders who could challenge his role, ideas or mystique. As well, it also was a way of preventing the party and state bureaucracy from forming a stratum with interests that could challenge his power.

Underlying the description of what Stalin did, was a larger point: Stalinism is seen as a phenomenon that also combined the tendency dating to the Tsarist period to use absolute state power to transform society from above. The Stalin period was extremely intense, including the repressive direction of industrialization and collectivization of agriculture. This was critical for Lewin, “Failure to take on board the collision between a developing industrial society and the reaction – or lack of reaction – of the peasantry, as well as the impact of this complex mix on the political regime, renders the course of Russian and Soviet history in the 20th century – 1917, Leninism, Stalinism and the final downfall – unintelligible.”

The result for the regime was an intensified administrative-repressive machinery, which, in turn, Stalin attempted to control through terror.

Another key point is that the actual industrialization, collectivization and the resulting societal transformation were anything but “controlled.” This is one of the many paradoxes that Lewin describes. The very nature of the system - its authoritarian/dictatorial methods, its centralization of decision making in the context of constant social turmoil - made it impossible to really control from the centre.

He shows that although Stalin tried to control everyday decisions he was unable to really control the basic process of planning and growth. What happened was a combination of terror and administrative orders (particularly ineffectual in motivating peasants and workers); and bureaucratic organization. When things didn’t work, there would be another round of terror and the creation of new and more complex administrative apparatuses, which only further increased the bureaucratic machinery to be controlled.

Aside from constructing a new party (a non-party) and a specific kind of despotic/bureaucratic state, Stalin also transformed the system’s ideology. When collectivization and primitive industrialization were completed, the system’s ethos was exhausted. Victory in WWII gave it a new life – and a necessity of rebuilding the war-ravaged economy – but the lifeblood of the revolutionary heritage was over. A new ideological mythology had to be constructed. Lewin argues persuasively that aside from the ritual references to the revolution, socialist ideas and a particular invocation of the name of Lenin, the party’s ideology developed into a set of nationalistic and patriotic themes and values, with Russia featured as a great industrial power – strengthened by the victory in WWII. →

The cult of the great leader – who inspired the creation of a new Russia – was part of this. Terror continued and Lewin demonstrates, from numerous documents, the unrelenting beat of Stalin’s paranoia and search for new victims – be they Jews, communists or his closest colleagues (who, like Mikoyan and Molotov, fully expected to be murdered in their turn).

Post-Stalin

The second section of the book traces the trajectory of the post-Stalin period. Here Lewin describes how, freed from the dictator’s ongoing purges, the state bureaucracy consolidated its hold over the economy, while large-scale urbanization, cultural sophistication and industrial development changed the social map and further challenged the system’s ability to cope. Party leaders engaged in numerous unsuccessful attempts to make the system work and stave-off decline and the overall level of terror and repression was fundamentally reduced, although the system retained its authoritarian character.

The gulag industry was closed. State and party functionaries as well as ordinary people no longer waited for the knock on the door in the middle of the night. Dissidents and those who either challenged or spoke out against the regime were persecuted, but the era of state terror was over, as Lewin demonstrates through an impressive array of internal document and commentaries.

The key element of the post-Stalin period was the consolidation of the bureaucratic stratum that controlled the economic institutions and gradually swallowed up efforts by the party apparatus to exercise political control.

Efforts by party leaders to exercise real control over the stratum that administered the economic levers of power failed. By trying to directly oversee the administration, the party apparatus was literally swallowed up by the latter. When the apparatus tried to retreat to more of a policy-making role, it was more or less ignored and forced once again to play a more direct role. Brilliant administrators such as Kosygin (who organized the evacuation of factories during the war and the supplying of Leningrad during the Nazi encirclement) were stymied in their efforts to organize change.

The danger of stagnation, decline and failure was known to many policymakers (indeed, Lewin argues that reliable information about most aspects of the internal system and the outside world was available to policymakers if they chose to heed them). A 1970 study organized under the leadership of Gosplan, the state-planning agency, predicted an economic breakdown by the end of the century. The advice was ignored by most, but taken seriously by a small number of people in the leadership circles.

Lewin describes how that stratum gradually evolved into the precursors of the new capitalist class that seized the means of production in the post-Soviet period. This resulted from a number of factors: ongoing corruption and accumulation of perks and

scarce luxury goods; their unquestioned ability to run the economic ministries – without real challenges from the party from above and working people from below; and their use of various informal means of providing spare parts and scarce goods necessary for the running of the economy (through trade, hoarding, etc.) provided pools of resources that they began to appropriate for themselves. As the system began to stagnate and break down, this stratum more and more saw itself as the natural inheritors of the soviet system.

In the pre-Gorbachev period, the only serious effort to reform the system came from Andropov, the former KGB head. He planned to bring-in democratic reforms, elements of market regulation and a mixed economy, free trade unions and a possible challenge to the power of both the party and the state bureaucracy. This platform was never carried out due to Andropov’s fatal illness. Gorbachev supported many of the same policies when he came to power, but the context had changed and they only fed growing entropy.

Overall Evaluation of the Soviet Experience

Lewin’s final chapter seeks to characterize the Soviet system as “bureaucratic absolutism”. It was not socialist. State ownership is not in itself socialism. The latter requires a profound democracy and social control over the economy. Instead, the Soviet system meant strong state control over society, with the state under the domination of a vast bureaucracy that ruled unchallenged. The party was ineffectual in controlling it and became its creature. The USSR was, “a rather ‘classic’ bureaucratic state, run by a pyramidal hierarchy.” Rooted in the experience of the Tsarist era, it presided over the radical transformation of society, but was unable to handle the requirements of a modernizing, technically and culturally sophisticated society. The ruling stratum became “stuck in a groove...used its power solely to further their personal interests.”

The book ends with a description of the social and economic decline of Russia in the shadow of the years of shock therapy and kleptocratic capitalism. Lewin argues that this has been accompanied by an obscurantist attempt to attack anything to do with the communist period – from the revolution to the end of the USSR. Russia can rebuild itself, but it must come to understand this experience, come to grips with it and build upon it – not seek to avoid it, deny it, or glorify the pre-revolutionary era. Knowledge of the USSR – and coming to understand its essential realities – is essential for building a progressive and humane future for Russia. **R**

Herman Rosenfeld is a union activist in Toronto.

Class War Muse, an Elephant by Other Means

Joe Rosenblatt

The Class War wouldn't just unfold on our earth's terrestrial plane, with the two contending classes, capitalist and wage-earner, battling for total class supremacy (from Acorn's perspective, either a loveless bourgeois rule or the loveable Dictatorship of the Proletariat). The struggle would also take place in the dark entrails of deep space, as revealed in just a few lines of Acorn's raging poem, "I Shout Love." I perceive that poem as another mutation of his elephant poem, filled as it is with animus, victimology, good and evil – and more importantly, to arouse the reader, furious fornication fortified with a deep abiding love, with such incendiary intensity that it would devour the love-fearing bourgeoisie in one combustible sitting. For Love to be Love has to have its bipolarity, hatred:

*Listen you money-plated bastards
puffing to blow back the rolling earth with your propaganda
bellows and oh-so reasoned negation of Creation:
when I shout Love I mean your destruction*

The refrain "I shout Love" works as an explosive charge at the beginning of nearly every stanza in this epic poem, and soon the listener is confronted with a highly symphonic diatribe against loveless capitalism, where images of love and hate intermingle. Nonetheless, the love released by Acorn's righteous muse is a cleansing luminous force, which not only penetrates the stopped ears of earthly evildoers but travels into the heavens, penetrating the cosmic debris of "dumb rock."

Acorn, who often made a few obscure references in some of his poems to the approach of *the bright ones*, renews the concept of cosmic light, taking it a step further: He perceives this light as a healing illumination, allied to the force of cosmic love, which can enter the very consciousness of closed minds contaminated by lies. The poet's egoism beams out to the stars and finds its way as the light of truth into the farthest reaches of the universe, attaching itself to "parsecs of night between the stars."

His kinetic cry for love reverberates "where suns in tumultuous sleep toss eruptions about them." Sensing the poet's hatred for the ruling class, the cynic in me intuits that "I Shout Love" could just as easily been replaced with "I Shout Hate." There is something unsettling to this rhetorical poem, shouting for the destruction of the bourgeoisie. Acorn's friend and, for a time, faithful disciple, Stan Dalton, once asked him whether he was advocating genocide, especially in his poem's explosive ending: "When I shout Love I mean your destruction."

At first, according to Dalton, Acorn defended his stance, declaring that the bombastic ending would stay as "it would be the outcome of the revolution." Later, much to his friend's surprise, the poet's more tender side prevailed, and he replaced the ending with a bland finale: "When I shout Love I mean the end of you as you are." This revised version of the poem was published by Toronto's Steel Rail Press in 1968. Dalton beseeched Acorn to stay with the original ending, but he wouldn't hear of it. **R**

Joe Rosenblatt, artist and poet, lives on Vancouver Island.

The Revolutionary Misfits by Victor Serge

YOU MAY FIND THIS SORT OF COMIC FAMILIAR. THAT'S COS REWRITING COMICS WAS FIRST DONE IN THE 60s - BY THE SITUATIONISTS. OLD IMAGES SET AGAINST NEW TEXT WOULD SPARK CONFLICT IN THE READER - WHO'D RESOLVE THAT CONFLICT BY ACTION.



IT SOUNDED GOOD. BUT IN PRACTICE, IT LED TO LONG, OBSCURE RANTS ABOUT ALIENATION - FORMALLY CORRECT, BUT INTERMINABLE. LET'S FACE IT, SITUATIONISTS ARE WANKERS. DON'T YOU JUST WANT TO GRAB THEM BY THEIR LAPELS & YELL, "GET A JOB!"?

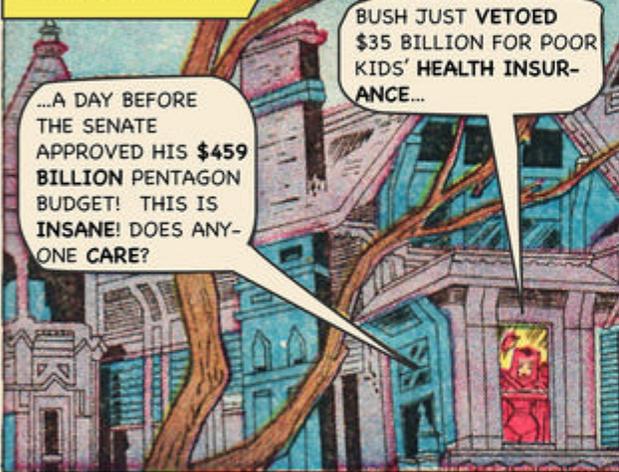


IT'S OK - YOU CAN ADMIT IT!

WE MUST COMBINE THE SITUATIONISTS' CREATIVITY WITH CONCRETE, CLASS STRUGGLE POLITICS. THAT'S THE MISSION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MISFITS! WE BRING MARXISM TO THE MASSES, NOT THE OTHER WAY ROUND!



MEANWHILE, IN THE HOME OF SOME MASSES ACROSS TOWN, TWO COSPLAY ENTHUSIASTS ARE BEMOANING THE RISE OF RIGHT-WING POLITICS AND PUBLIC APATHY...



...A DAY BEFORE THE SENATE APPROVED HIS \$459 BILLION PENTAGON BUDGET! THIS IS INSANE! DOES ANYONE CARE?

BUSH JUST VETOED \$35 BILLION FOR POOR KIDS' HEALTH INSURANCE...

AND MY COSTUME IS FADING! HAVE YOU NOTICED?

YOU GOTTA STOP WASHING IN HOT WATER. YEP, BUSH IS A MORON. WORST. PRESIDENT. EVER.



BUT HE'S NOT STUPID! HE DOES THE JOB HE'S SUPPOSED TO!

HE'S SUPPOSED TO SERVE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, NOT DRAG US INTO UN-WINNABLE WARS AND BURDEN US WITH CRIPPLING DEBT!

BULLSHIT! HIS JOB IS TO REPRESENT A COALITION OF THE RULING CLASS. HE WON THE WAR IN IRAQ! THE OIL INDUSTRY WON CONTROL OVER IRAQI OIL REVENUE; THE MILITARY GETS TO BE WORLD COP AGAIN!



THERE YOU GO WITH YOUR CONSPIRACY THEORIES! BUSH IS A WEAK MAN WITH BAD ADVISERS...

...NOT SOME EVIL MASONIC ILLUMINATI ON THE PAYROLL OF HALLIBURTON! BOOGA BOOGA!



CAPITALISM ISN'T A CONSPIRACY - IT'S A SYSTEM! BUSH, CLINTON; THEY WORK FOR DIFFERENT FRACTIONS OF CAPITAL, NOT THE PEOPLE!