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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.

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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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Canada

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Socialist Realignment

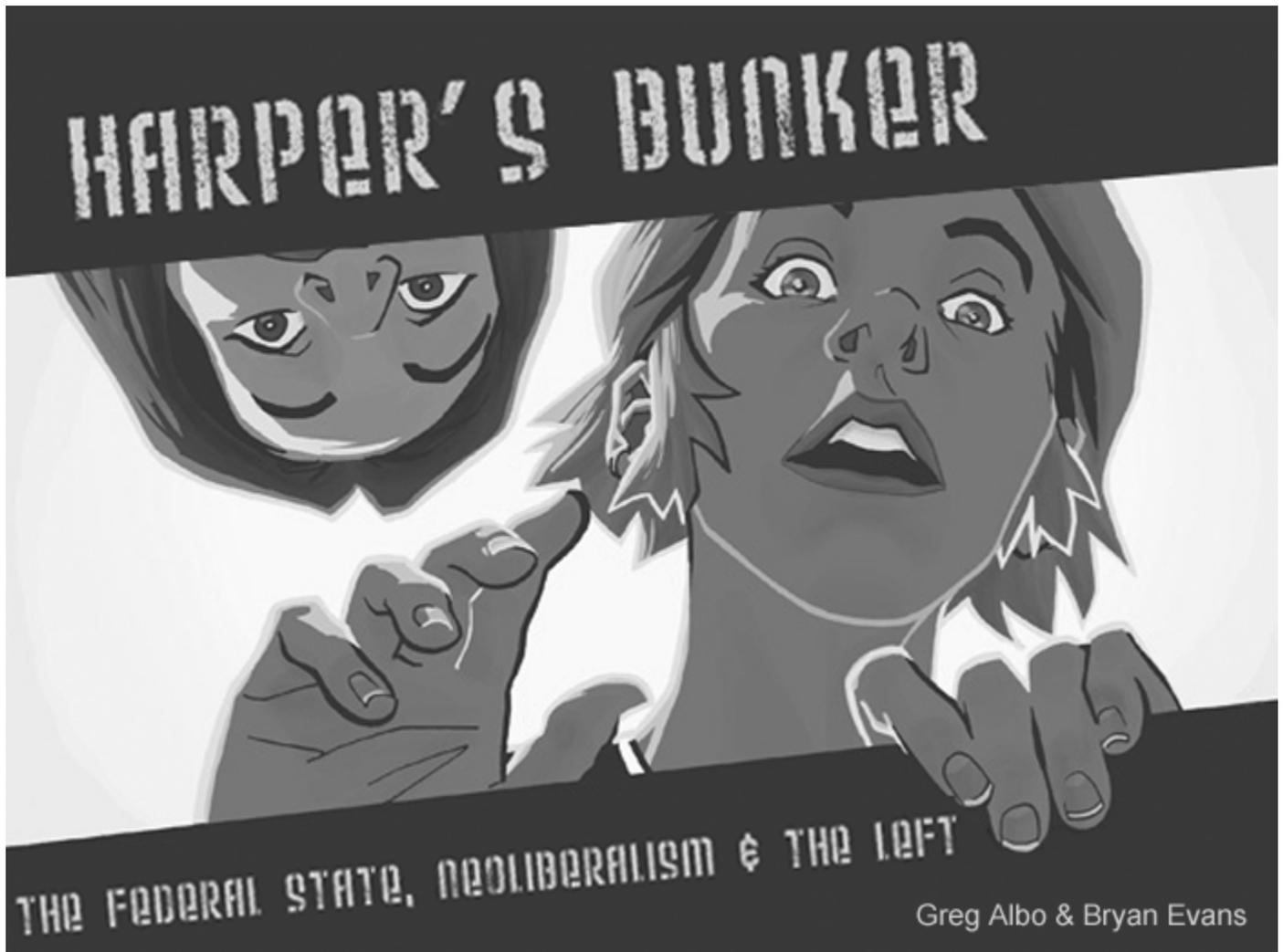
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The manner of governing of Stephen Harper's Conservative government might be characterized as a paradox with a purpose. A sharp centralization of authority over decision-making and political management – particularly to augment policing, warmaking and market-enhancing capacities – is accompanied by an equally focused policy agenda that seeks to hollow out the distributive capacities of the Canadian federal state in the executive branches. This simultaneous centralization and decentralization is a key feature of the process of state restructuring under neoliberalism.

It is not a matter of bypassing or weakening the state in favour of markets in general, but a change in the form of the state: the executive of the state is strengthened relative to parliaments and participative bodies; state economic apparatuses facilitating the internationalization of capital and market processes to bolster capital accumulation are given policy precedence over redistributive and regulatory departments of the state; decentralization is pursued as an administrative and constitutional agenda to weaken redistributive and regulatory policies while centralized protection of trade, commerce and private property are adopted; and the internal processes of all levels of the state are increasingly commercialized, privatized, insulated from democratic accountability and subordinated to capitalist agencies.

The phenomenon of centralized decentralization was first observed with respect to the British experience with Thatcherism. It was observed that the power of the state was in fact becoming increasingly concentrated – 'free market, strong state for these iron times' – at the centre of the state. This centralization of power was necessary, politically speaking, as a means to drive through an agenda to restructure the economy, defeat the trade unions, and erode the welfare state. The Thatcher-era Conservatives understood that state power was a necessary element to restructure the state itself and its relations with different aspects of civil society.

This process had its origins in Canada under Brian Mulroney's Conservative government of the 1980s (although the Liberal government's of Pierre Trudeau first brought neoliberalism to Canada and began administrative restructuring in the last years of his administration). It gained a great deal of momentum under the Liberal government of Jean Chretien and the massive restructuring budgets of Paul Martin in the mid-90s.

What Canadians are witnessing in Harper's Ottawa today is a variation on these themes. There is a particular further centralizing of power at the centre of state, and in key state economic apparatuses, as neoliberalism 'hardens' in response to the current

economic and military impasses. Alongside this, a new agenda for decentralization of social and redistributive policies of the federal government appears to be forming. It is in this light that some of the recent developments of the Conservative minority government need to be read as they prepare for the fall parliamentary agenda and the coming federal election.

Centralizing Power at the Summit of the Canadian State

Even by the standards of other liberal democracies, the Canadian state, burdened by the vestiges of British colonialism, is among the least democratic. The immense powers previously held by the colonial-era governor-generals have, over time, been transferred to the office of the prime minister. This includes the power over appointments to the cabinet and to important non-elected positions within the state apparatus. The result is that the prime minister and those individuals who inhabit the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) wield immense power – Canada's elected dictatorship – over the workings of the Canadian state.

This political-institutional legacy substantially enables the centralization of power within the Harper government. This runs along several dimensions including a narrowing of persons and institutions which can influence policy direction. In terms of the elected and appointed officials constituting the executive offices of the Canadian state, what is most evident is the number of former 'Common Sense Revolutionaries', from the hyper-neoliberal Ontario Government of Mike Harris of the 1990s, who are now at the centre of the Harper government.

Minister of Finance Jim Flaherty served in prominent positions in both the Harris and successor Ernie Eves' governments, including as minister of labour, corrections, attorney general, finance and deputy premier. He was clearly identified with the hard right within the Common Sense Revolution and aggressively attacked Eves in the leadership battle to succeed Harris as party leader and premier as too moderate. John Baird, the current Minister of Environment, was the social services and energy minister through the Common Sense Revolution years. There he took a hard line on young offenders and took every opportunity to boast that the rapidly dropping number of social assistance recipients was evidence of the success of the Harris government's social and economic policy. When asked where these tens of thousands of former welfare recipients were ending up he admitted not having a clue. Tony Clement, who is responsible for the health portfolio, is another Common Sense Revolution veteran who at various times held the transportation, environment, housing, and health portfolios. Peter Van Loan, the Conservative house leader, was president of the Ontario Conservative party under Harris. And behind the scenes, Harper recently appointed as his chief of staff in the Prime Minister's Office, Mike Harris's former chief policy advisor and also chief of staff, Guy Giorno. This is in addition to a bevy of lesser known young Common Sense Revolutionaries who found their way into the Harper government as policy and communications specialists in various minister's offices.

Taken together, these individual conservative partisans and several of their former colleagues were all central players in Ontario's Common Sense Revolution. They left Ontario a stunningly different place than when they entered government in massively restructuring government and bolstering corporate power. A similar project is under construction in Ottawa to more radically pursue neoliberal policies, only there it is slowed by the realities of minority government. Still, the Harper government is two and one-half years old and there are clear signs which look eerily like Ontario in the 1990s.

Of course there are 'insiders' of note who have no link to Ontario's Common Sense Revolution such as Foreign Affairs Minister David Emerson and Defence Minister Peter Mackay. By virtue of their current portfolios they are responsible for policy fields of considerable importance to the Harper government as it aligns Canada to an unprecedented extent to the ambitions of American imperialism. Emerson in particular is interesting in terms of his background as Deputy Minister of Finance in the British Columbia government of Bill Vander Zalm but also as a director, prior to election to Parliament in 2003, of Macdonald, Dettwiler and Associates (MDA). MDA specializes in data and information processing as well as various satellite technologies which have applications to missile and other weapons systems. Moreover, MDA's American parent company, Orbital Sciences, is a major missile defence contractor.

As Industry Minister in the Liberal Paul Martin government (Emerson crossed the floor to join the Conservatives shortly after the Conservative win in 2006) Emerson lobbied for a Canadian aerospace industry strategy where he openly recognized the "potential industrial cooperation opportunities for Canada associated with Ballistic Missile Defence" (*The Hill Times*, November 22-28, 2004). Fast forward to the Conservative budget of 2008 and a line of continuity is apparent. A 'Canada First Defence Strategy' was proposed entailing a \$12 billion increase in defence spending over the next 20 years and using public money to forge a "new relationship with industry" as the budget speech referred to it.

Neoliberals & the Personnel of the Federal State

The changing nature of the Canadian state cannot be ignored in all of this. The long-standing doctrine in public administration that the state is neutral serves to mask a rather different reality. Forty years ago British political scientist Ralph Miliband launched a debate regarding the nature of the state wherein he argued the state is an instrument of the ruling classes. That is to say, the liberal democratic state is a capitalist state in that it is dominated by the ruling classes via the elites who control the state, and the way that departments of government are subordinated to business interests. The relations between the state and corporate interests, however, do not always take the same institutional and political forms. Today, the state and its institutions are taking new organizational and corporate forms that are organically linked to the neoliberal project. This can also be seen in the shuffling of state elites under Harper. →

A case in point is what is happening to the very uppermost echelons of the federal state elite. In March 2006, exactly one month after being sworn in as prime minister, Harper appointed Kevin Lynch to the top position in the Canadian public service. An economist by education, he had a long career in the ministries of finance and industry as well as the Bank of Canada. Within six months Lynch had removed a number of senior bureaucrats. It is purely speculative to attribute motive to the removals and ensuing promotions but alignment with the agenda of the government is always at least a part of such moves.

Lynch's predecessor as head of the public service, Alex Himelfarb, while no leftist, was a traditional public servant who saw the role of senior public servants as one of offering policy advice, even unwelcome policy advice, to the cabinet and prime minister. Himelfarb's background as a former professor of sociology, and then as a public servant associated with social policy initiatives, was probably simply not a good fit in assisting the Harper government pursue its neoliberal economic agenda. Moreover, a pluralist approach to policy advice was not welcome in the Harper state. As with the Common Sense Revolution in Ontario, the latitude for policy development narrowed substantially. The role of the public service has been recast to simply implement the priorities of the government without regard to alternatives or warnings respecting potential downsides.

According to a well-placed Ottawa consultant, the centralization of the policy-making function in the prime minister's office has led to the loss of several senior policy managers, especially at the assistant and deputy minister level. With little interesting work to do – such as the massive gutting of funding of cultural programmes in the quiet of August, many public officials, at both senior and intermediate levels, have departed. This is a crucial way that neoliberalism has consolidated across the senior levels of the Canadian state. Neoliberals have consistently been moved into key bureaucratic posts, in a sense forming themselves as 'organic intellectuals' of the neoliberalization of the state. The Harper government is continuing this process in a more thorough-going reorganization of state personnel.

Centralization of Power for Decentralization of Social and Economic Security

It is important to see the recruitment of the many political and administrative leaders of the Common Sense Revolution, and the extensive dismissal, circulation and conscription of new state personnel, to the Canadian state with a sharpening of neoliberalism in Canada. This is a strengthening the central executive and organs of the Canadian state. They are putting in place the political and administrative capacities to pursue a further fundamental decentralization of the redistributive capacities of the state. This is consistent with neoliberalism, the legacy of the Reform and Alliance Parties that Harper has sustained, the Conservative strategy for gaining political space in Quebec and the agenda the Harrisites have brought to Ottawa.

The fundamental premise of the postwar 'social contract' in Canada, as elsewhere among the northern capitalist states, was establishing some minimal floor of social and economic security. The period of post-war and depression reconstruction was best captured by the 1943 *Report on Social Security* which would inform the next 30 years of largely federally-driven welfare state building in Canada. This redistributive bargain was built into the institutions of federalism in Canada, particularly through federal transfers but also by Federal government administrative and policy oversight.

Today, in contrast, the Harper government is proposing to build on the defunding and deconstruction which took place under the Mulroney and Chretien governments who together brought Canadians a deepening insecurity through the effective constitutionalization of free trade and an unprecedented retreat of the federal state from the funding of social programs. Recent suggestions that the provinces may be provided more economic autonomy is a program to further constrain what is left of the Canadian social security state. As it is the social program fabric of Canada, given that the 10 provinces are responsible for program delivery, is increasingly a hodge-podge of unequal access, quality and coverage. Greater decentralization without fiscal capacity, that is the ability to fund programs, will assuredly translate into greater inequality. No doubt, as has been the case elsewhere, devolution to subnational levels of government, whether local or provincial, sets the stage for a race to the bottom as these jurisdictions compete with each other to win investment and curry favour with capital by cutting taxes and rolling back social security.

The centralizing agenda of Harper's Conservative government, particularly as it relates to political and state personnel, has its counterpart in this decentralizing agenda with respect to social and redistributive policies. It is one of the key areas that Canadian neoliberals are keen to act further upon. This is framed in terms of the Conservative's 'strict constitutionalism' in assessing the federal division of powers in Canada: the federal government should not be involved in policy areas, such as health, education, welfare, culture, that are allocated as provincial powers in the Canadian constitution. This is the neoliberal competition state further displacing the welfare state. This is Harper's Canada.

The Coming Federal Election

While neoliberalism in Canada, as throughout the world, is increasingly discredited, and has less and less popular appeal, it continues on inside state institutions and power structures. Economic crises and military debacles have not yet broken it. The opposition parties all reject, to varying degrees, some of the worst aspects of the Conservative government. On this basis alone, it will be worthwhile campaigning to defeat the Conservative as one of the most egregious governments Canada has had in 80 years in terms of domestic policy and the most supine ever as faithful ally of American imperialism. But the political scene in Canada is all but absent of political alternatives to neoliberalism: all of the parties have

accepted the ‘new realities’ of Ottawa, and none is attempted to build an anti-neoliberal politics.

It is pure fantasy to suggest, as many left nationalists have been doing, that a Liberal-NDP alliance and tactical voting would serve as a means to ‘reclaim’ Canada against the ‘neoconservatives’ of Harper. The Liberals implemented the main features of neoliberalism in Canada. And social democracy around the world has accommodated neoliberalism, as has the NDP everywhere it has held power in Canada. Indeed, social democracy has realigned itself in terms of its organizational basis, its policies and the political alliances it forms. As a political instrument, social democratic parties such as the NDP play as much a role in disorganizing the working class as they once did in organizing it (under a particular labourist ideology).

This is a feature of the broad collapse of the Left since 1989. In Canada, it has led to an array of forms of political dissent: political apathy, minoritarian radical campaigns, social coalitions, efforts to forge electoral pacts and starry-eyed efforts at reforming the NDP. This has meant that elections have come to focus on voting for the NDP as the best in existing circumstances (with a few calling for a wider electoral front to defeat the hard right, which has left the wider electorate more confused when the same general policies continue on).

The features of neoliberalism that Harper has been deepening, however, do not lend themselves to easy reversal through elections or through these political forms. So discussions about electoral strategy in the context of existing political forces becomes ever more formalistic—the end of democratic politics that the neoliberals have had as a central objective. That is a crucial lesson of the last two decades. Social transformation, and even just the breaking of neoliberalism, is not going to occur through a singular political rupture, or a set of reforms built into an electoral alliance, or a series of spontaneous scattered revolts. To form an alternative to neoliberalism and the form of state it has constructed, the formation of a new social bloc with a systemic alternative able to contest for political power is required.

The Left in Canada has been much slower than elsewhere to come to terms with this new political reality. In both more radical small currents and in key union and social movements, there are just calls for more of the same, only better or more determined than the past. This is intellectual nonsense and increasingly politically debilitating. The coming federal election will provide an opportunity to defeat Harper. But it will also allow the Left to campaign on a series of key political demands – such as getting out of Afghanistan, a public infrastructure programme to reverse carbon emissions, settlements with First Nations, constraints over financial capital – that can also be a foundation for its own rebuilding and emergence as a social force. **R**

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Habitats for Socialism

Alan Sears

Socialism is an endangered species. It is now in such a marginal position in much of the world, including the Canadian state, that it is an open question whether it will be a vibrant component of the next wave of radical renewal. This threat is not because movements will not revive – they will. Nor is it because the working class has disappeared – it is bigger than ever. Nor is it because socialism has nothing useful to say. Actually, socialism can do an amazing job of making sense of the capitalist world we live in while providing powerful insights into possibilities for change, offering us a vision of real democracy, social justice and equity in all areas of our lives.

The threat of extinction is real, but it is important to be very specific about the reasons. The habitat in which 20th century socialism thrived no longer exists in the same form. Socialism was vital as part of a broad infrastructure of dissent that developed in the context of a particular organization of life and work and specific political projects. The last 30 years have seen important changes in the organization of life and work, and in the political sphere, that has transformed the landscape within capitalist societies.

Socialism needs to adapt to thrive in a changing world. Adaptation has a bad name in the socialist movement as it is often associated with a loss of the radical agenda as part of a resigned acceptance of the unchangeability of capitalist conditions. That is not what I mean here. I am suggesting we need to assess the specific changes that have virtually eliminated the old habitat of socialism and the particular possibilities that have arisen for the next new left.

Of course, some people will be quite happy to see socialism on the endangered species list, pointing out correctly that it has so often failed to meet its own standards for universal freedom and democracy. Adaptation means a vibrant engagement with struggles of the oppressed and exploited, always learning from the theories that emerge directly out of those mobilizations.

Others will want to preserve 20th century socialism, and thus will create zoo-like micro-environments in which a few of the old beasts will survive behind bars. This preservationist impulse makes the permanent marginalization of the zoo the condition for socialist organizing. The survival of a few buffalo in a cage does not mean that the unfenced prairie still exists as it once did.

In this article, I want to explore the specific historical changes that have placed socialism on the endangered species list and to open up discussion on ways we might begin to respond. My goal is to contribute to a process of revival that will get socialism off the path to extinction.

Destruction of Habitat

The habitat that socialism thrived in through much of the twentieth century was the infrastructure of dissent developed as workers, women, people of colour, aboriginal people, lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people, and others fought for justice and social inclusion. As people fought back they developed an infrastructure of dissent that cultivated collective capacities for memory (reflection on past experiences and struggles), analysis (discussion and debate about theory and change), communication (outside of official or commercial media channels) and action (networks of formal and informal solidarity). In practice, the infrastructure of dissent for 20th century socialism included: radical oppositions within trade unions, left media and publishing, spaces for shared cultural and social activities (bars, bookstores, labour temples), socialist and anarchist groups, national liberation organizations, social movements and a vast range of informal networks in neighbourhoods or workplaces.

Socialist theory did not pay much attention to this infrastructure of dissent, simply taking it for granted as one does a familiar environment. It is only its disappearance that has drawn it to our attention, as we try to make sense of the gap between the great potential for socialist renewal and the reality of attrition. Further, the infrastructure of dissent is a bit hard to specify as it is the cumulative impact of a variety of activities and practices that exceeds the sum of the parts

The attrition of infrastructure of dissent is due to key changes in working class life and work and in the character of political projects of the oppressed and exploited. These changes have resulted from defeats at the hands of employers' offensives and state crackdowns, but have also, in complex and contradictory ways, emerged from important victories.

The first of these changes is the accomplishment of full citizenship by large sections of the excluded population. It is only through struggle from below that the mass of people won democratic rights, social, educational and health programmes and basic human rights protections. Movements for national liberation and against colonialism played a key role in these struggles for full citizenship. It took long struggles for workers, women, people of colour, lesbians and gays and colonized peoples to win full citizenship. Of course, full citizenship fell far short of demands for real equality and social justice, but it did represent real gains for many.

At the same time, citizenship itself is exclusionary. Many others, such as aboriginal people and undocumented migrants, never

won those rights. Those rights were always partial at best, and many were left out altogether. Citizenship provided important gains for some, and movements tended to depoliticize once those basic rights were won. As movements depoliticized, the infrastructure of dissent faded.

The second of these changes is the transformation of life and work, associated most sharply with lean production over the past 25 years. Lean production aims to undercut workers' capacities for collective action, shattering any sense of security, polarizing the workforce between a shrinking number of better jobs (offering decent pay, security and benefits) and an growing number of worse ones. Partnership regimes make workers participants in their own exploitation and the spatial movement of production shifts to greenfield locations away from traditional centres of working class activism.



These changes in the workplace are tied to a variety of changes in everyday life. Most importantly, workers not only won citizenship for sections of the working class, but also increased their access to the market through wage increases and gains in work security. Sections of the working class were able to sustain themselves through wage labour in ways that would not have been possible without unionization. Unionized workers gained new access to cars, home ownership and a variety of other goods and services. The sharp reduction of state services over the last 30 years has eliminated many programs and spaces that were outside the market.

The result has been a destruction of older forms of working class community. The richest development of infrastructure of dissent was often rooted in communities in which work and residence coincided. Many people worked, played and sustained themselves alongside the same neighbours. Suburbanization and the car increased the separation of work from home. Further, leisure patterns have been fragmented as the commercial entertainment industries

developed new forms of household and personal devices. Childhood has been increasingly pushed onto the market, with the development of new standards of fashion, fulfillment and fun associated with products for sale designed to elevate expectations.

These changes have led to an attrition of the old infrastructure of dissent. The new forms of infrastructure that will revive our abilities to express, analyze, imagine and act collectively have yet to emerge. One of great challenges is to contribute to that rebuilding.

Emerging Habitat; Radical Renewal

Socialism has moved onto the endangered list in part because of an overall weakness of activist movements, which are at a fairly low point in Canada outside Quebec, and indeed in much of the world. Despite their current weakness, I think we can be pretty sure that movements will revive. Injustice is not going away, but is getting worse. The potential power of mass mobilization remains. At some point, people will rediscover this potential power as they challenge the poverty, racism, sexism, heterosexism, militarism, ecological ravages and alienation of life under capitalism.

There has been a period of weakness since the decline of the vibrant movements for global justice and against poverty in the wake of September 11, 2001. The anti-war movement started big, but seems to have hit a steady-state level that is quite modest. Other than that, things have gone quite quiet.

Now, there seem to be some signs of renewed life in certain movements, but at the same time others are facing severe defeats almost without resistance. Effective campaigns against Israeli apartheid, for aboriginal rights and for the rights of migrants without status have seen actions in the streets and on campuses. These campaigns are linked in their focus on people who have been excluded and marginalized; and in their emphasis on building movements through defiant activism that challenges the law and the dominant power relations.

Yet at the same time, there are important defeats underway with only the most limited resistance. The CAW had accepted unprecedented concessions in the latest round of bargaining with the Big Three and there has been only symbolic mobilization against the huge layoffs in the auto sector. The auto sector is particularly important as the auto assembly plants are one of the last bastions of good (unionized, secure, decent pay, good benefits and time off) working class jobs in the private sector.

Capitalism Unmasked

The modest signs of movement revival right now do not make an indisputable case for radical revival, balanced as they are against real defeats currently underway. These modest signs →

A New Habitat & the Next New Left

It is daunting to face up to the loss of habitat that threatens socialism in much of the world, particularly if you believe that the revival of socialist organizing can play an important role in reviving the infrastructure of dissent. I wish this article could have a more triumphant tone. But I firmly believe we must face up to our current predicament if we are to survive it.

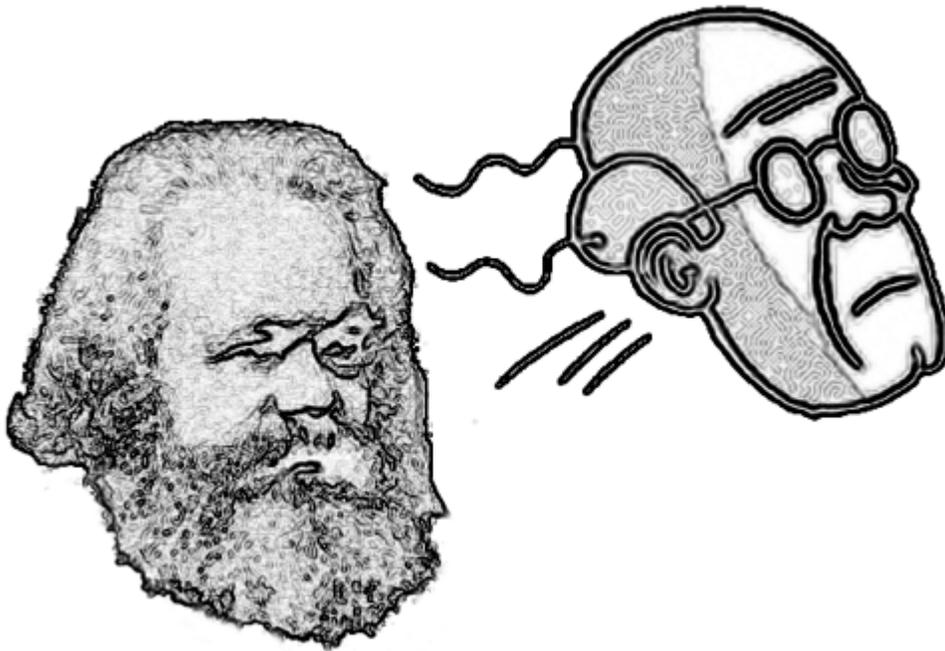
That means fighting against nostalgia and amnesia. We cannot simply look back wistfully on the old left with pink coloured glasses and resolve to work twice as hard to bring it back. Nor can we afford to casually dismiss what activists have learned over 150 years of struggle and give up the big picture vision of overturning capitalism.

Rather, we need to work to understand the ways the next new left is beginning to emerge, through participating in activism and adapting socialist resources to relate experiences in specific struggles to a broader picture. This adaptation of socialist resources will require a real openness to learning from struggles rather than simply teaching lessons from the past. Specifically, we need to be very clear about the ways socialism has been oriented around whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality and the realities of only limited sections of the working class.

I think a socialism oriented towards the next new left will be one that focuses on rebuilding the broader infrastructure of dissent rather than competing homogenous sects each claiming a monopoly on true socialism. It will include cultural spaces, a sense of fun, mutual respect (enough to disagree sharply and openly, but also to listen) and the right mix of attention to the immediate struggles of the day and serious analysis of the big picture.

I wish this were less vague – but I believe that putting flesh on this skeleton is a collective project. One of our urgent needs is to open up conversation about what socialist renewal might entail in the world we live in now. This conversation must be broader than any one organization or current, and must feature experiences and perspectives that have often been marginalized in socialism. It must be open to the future (we don't know exactly what the next left will be like) and open to the past (not casually dismissing the resources accumulated through activist experience). If we can find ways of doing that, we can nudge socialism toward new habitats in which it might thrive again. **R**

Alan Sears teaches sociology at Ryerson and is a member of the New Socialist Group.



fit with a bigger picture of a neoliberal capitalism in which inequality, injustice and imperialism appear ever more naked. The welfare state arguably put a fig leaf over some aspects of capitalist exploitation, as certain sections of the working class saw real improvements in living standards, security and access to leisure. These gains by previous generations of workers have now largely been wiped out by neoliberalism, which aims to eliminate access to any goods, services or spaces outside of those purchased on the market.

It is not hard to see that the rich are getting richer at an amazing pace, while the poor face much deeper poverty. Working people face immense insecurity and a time crunch, with more hours of paid work required to make ends meet and more effort required to sustain ourselves and our families or friends as state services are cut back, so that patients are now cast out of hospital still needing considerable care from those around them. The imperialist war machine is in action and gearing up for more destruction, while the 'security' apparatus cracks down on dissidents and almost anyone of North African, West Asian or South Asian background.

Racialized inequality is intensified not only by these state security operations, but also by a labour market that relies on the super-exploitation of undocumented workers doing bad jobs for low pay. The privatization drive is increasing gender inequities, heaping more responsibilities onto the unpaid labour performed mainly by women in the home. Finally, capitalism prevents us from dealing systematically with the crisis of environmental sustainability that threatens all of our futures.

These horrors summon up struggles. The infrastructure of dissent helps develop the capacities to sustain these struggles and direct them strategically, ultimately linking local and immediate fightbacks to a broader project of challenging and overturning the system. Socialist organizing contributes in important ways to the development and operation of the infrastructure of dissent.

Visions of Class, Visions Beyond Class

Some Thoughts About Socialist Renewal

Ingo Schmidt

The State of the Left

Currently the Canadian left largely consists of small groups that focus on specific issues. Occasionally some of those groups are able to mobilize people beyond their activist membership base. However, even rather successful mobilizations against corporate globalization or imperialist wars haven't helped to build bigger and more unified organizations. They haven't impacted electoral politics either. Returning to their homes, the mass of protestors left the various activist groups alone as possessors of an alternative expert knowledge that NGOs, union and party bureaucracies can tap off whenever they wish. If needed, such alternative expertise could even be incorporated into state policies. While some circles on the left, namely the NGO-community, don't ask for more anyways, radical groups constantly either bemoan or discuss their marginal status in Canadian society.

Attempts to funnel high levels of mobilization into a more sustainable structured movement that would help to rebuild a left outside of traditional parties and union machineries overestimated protestors' readiness for long-term political commitments. Other attempts that aimed at building a socialist current within the NDP, to push the party as a whole to the left, underestimated the organizations capacities to absorb individuals and draw some activist groups into its orbit. Recent discussions about socialist renewal are largely confined to groups that identify themselves as socialist but haven't yet found ways to pursue socialist politics within topical coalitions with non-socialist groups.

What this signifies is that socialism is at best one among other issues the left is concerned about. It is far from providing the overarching framework within which environmental destruction, sexism and racism can be tied together. Instead of one big movement with different facets, there are fragmented single-issue groups that can hardly claim to represent one or many movements. Neither regrouping among those groups, organizing efforts, nor any kind of coalition building will help to strengthen the left unless such endeavours are part of a shift of the discursive field in which the left is currently operating. Beyond their internal meetings, even socialist groups have accepted the dominant notion of civil society, which leaves room for all sorts of topical, and often isolated, movements and mobilizations, but is rarely understood as a terrain of ideological struggle that is structured by antagonistic class relations.

The Working Class Spectre

The reason that there is no socialist politics which inspires people beyond small circles is the absence of a concept of working class. To be more precise, socialist circles, and a few academics it might be added, talk about class in an abstract manner that doesn't resonate among other activists, let alone the people who are theoretically predestined to be members of that class. Actually-existing workers rarely identify themselves as members of the working class and would much rather see themselves as part of imagined communities such as nations, members of religious communities or sports clubs. Work enters their self-identification mostly through professional associations and unions.

Although socialists see the latter often seen as "distinct organizations of the working class", unions, in this regard, clearly reflect the views and attitudes of most of their members and rarely try to transcend the sectionalism of business and craft unionism. Where unions adopt social movement unionism they typically understand social movements as present-day topical groups, with which labour can engage in coalitions. Only hard-nosed union lefties know that social movement was once used in the singular and was just another word for the labour or working class movement.

However, this past haunts not only the small number of socialists who bemoan the decline of a once powerful movement, it also haunts union bureaucrats, NDP leaders and topical movement activists. Ask any of them about their views on working class politics and most likely you get a caricature that portrays the working class as marching columns of white male blue-collar workers who follow their union or party leaders. Some, mostly aging union and NDP folks, use this caricature to express the grief about the decline of a certain kind of working class politics. More often, the decreasing employment share of white male blue-collar workers is used to substantiate the claim that a once homogenous working class has vanished into a multitude of social positions and identities that can't be forced into the one single concept of class. Some bemoan the decline of a labour movement that had largely failed to organize workers beyond manual factory jobs; others happily join the postmodern mainstream of minorities. Both identify the working class as nothing but a bunch of white male blue-collar workers.

Working classes always were, and still are, comprised by men and women of different colours and citizenships, working in different sectors and occupations and under rather different conditions. Only (petty) bourgeois class prejudice fails to recognize diversity and dignity among workers; but it sure loves to subordinate them as a homogenous and mindless factor of production. As often, it should be noted, neoclassical economics offers much more succinct expression of such class prejudice than postmodern jargon. →

Discontent, Culture & Socialist Imagination

Talk to ordinary people and you hear about lots of frustration: Speed-up at work, on-call work, constantly changing jobs, fear for plant closures, insecurity about the kids' future, difficulties to coordinate work and family schedules, lack of money, feelings of shallowness and emptiness that can't be consumed away and on and on and on. Dealing, or at least coping, with these issues is difficult because an all-pervasive market logic, maybe better called market magic, tells people that they are free to choose and that therefore, if they fail to achieve what they were aiming at, it is either their own fault or anonymous market forces decided not to deliver on certain choices. Thus, life seems to be a gamble where some are simply luckier than others. Even hard work might be a wrong bet and therefore not be rewarded. This logic conven-

iently denies the bourgeoisie's responsibility for poor working and living conditions. It also leaves those who live and suffer under these conditions with a sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

Sure enough, it's not the job of the bourgeoisie to comfort the working class anyways. All they and their hired middle-class ideologues have to do is to produce workers' compliance with the existing conditions. But what about the left? There are certainly groups and activists who, within the dominant civil society discourse, consider themselves as left and are seen as such by others, although they effectively have turned their back upon ordinary people's problems. But there are also many others who do care about those issues. There are some who understand the ways industrial restructuring causes work-related stress, others who know about the concerns of female workers, immigrant workers, the working poor or any other particular segment of the working class. However, often their expert knowledge only allows them to talk about or to their "target group", but doesn't enable them to engage in mutual exchange with them. Where such exchange happens, it is mostly organized around specific issues, such as gender, immigration or poverty, but the common denominator, being working class, is lost. Thus, there are antagonistic class relations that allow capitalists to subordinate and exploit workers. At the same time, classes have become invisible behind the veil of civil society and individual market exchange.

The reason for this is the lack of a common culture that would allow workers and activists to engage in the exchange of ideas and the exploration of alternatives beyond particular issues and the organizational confines of union and party apparatuses or the more informal, but usually very hierarchical, NGO structures. Whenever there were powerful labour movements in the past, they developed around working class cultures that transcended particular concerns, disseminated feelings of solidarity between activist core groups and less involved outsiders and included visions of a better world.

Just for clarification, culture is neither understood here as the consumption of mass-produced films, music, etc., nor as the subservient admiration of the artefacts of the high cultures of current and previous ruling classes. Contrary to such notions, culture is understood as a collective communication process that helps its participants to identify as a group and also to define and articulate their interests. In this process symbols and languages, such as songs, film and texts, serve as means of communication. However, it's neither the genius of working class artists or intellectuals that provide those means to the ordinary worker. What artists and intellectuals can do, though, is to pick up ideas that are floating around in communication processes and express them in a concentrated form. Poems,



songs, films and texts that are produced this way may in turn enrich further communication and eventually lead to commonly shared working class politics, which transcends particular concerns without subordinating them to abstract notions of class.

What's to be done? Mapping Class Relations, Making Working Classes

To contribute to the reinvention of working class culture, politics and socialist imagination, discussion groups of organized and un-organized socialists should be formed. The intent of such groups is not to abandon any existing groups or tie them into any form of united front. As was pointed out above, such attempts will not create a stronger left unless dominant notions of civil society, no matter whether they are actively promoted or passively accepted, can be replaced by a discourse on class. This is what

these new discussion groups should be about. They aim at creating a space in which individual activists, regardless of their political affiliations or specific fields of activity, can explore approaches to working class renewal.

Two steps are suggested in this regard. Step one could be called mapping of class relations. Various approaches to class theory and a wealth of empirical information on all aspects of the living and working conditions of ordinary people can guide a discussion about the dividing lines of class. Contrary to notions of individual market exchange and civil society involvement, class puts people into different categories. It is a process of classification that does not only aim at identifying those who belong to a particular class but also those who belong to a different class. Thus, class discourse mainly explores the borderlands between classes. Given the role that nation-states and the attached notions of citizenship play in determining an individual's position within society, the question of class is inextricably linked to the question of borders between classes in different countries. It would be pointless to neglect actually existing social and political borders just because we are aiming at a classless, and therefore borderless world.

Maps are meant to guide people in unknown territory; this is as true for geographical maps as for a social class map. However, while the former can be bought cheaply and allow anyone who knows how to read them to find their way, the latter hardly exist. This is not only because few efforts to draw them have been made recently, it is also because the mapping of class is much more entwined with the making of classes as agents of change than the mapping of landscape impacts geographical change. The political geography that has developed since European imperialism conquered the world, and depicted it on world maps mirroring its bourgeois self-image, should certainly not be forgotten, but is not the main point here.

What matters here are the actual relations between the mapping of capitalist class relations and the making, or remaking, of working classes. Discussions among socialists may lead to ideas about the ways in which communications with ordinary people could be organized. This would be step two and, to be sure, does not mean that the former advise the latter. Any such approach would only reproduce the existing gulf between the small number of left possessors of alternative expert knowledge and the unarticulated estrangement among masses of people. Only mutual respect and recognition would allow the creation of a communication process beyond socialist discussion groups. Only such a process can help to remake a working class and thus a stronger left. **R**

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Communism's New Crisis

Boris Kagarlitsky



A decade ago, the triumph of liberalism in Europe was so overwhelming that even parties that traced their political lineage to the early 20th-century revolutionary working class movement did not to speak openly about the radical transformation of society. Communist parties closed down or hastily reinvented themselves as Social Democrats, while Social Democratic parties became liberal parties.

Some Communist organizations kept their name as a kind of “traditional brand name” appealing to older voters. But they radically changed their ideology, as was the case in Russia, where Communists became conservative nationalists, openly declaring their monarchical and religious proclivities. Socialists in Western Europe occupied a position to the right of liberals. Finally, some Communist parties — for example, in Greece and Portugal — tried to pretend that nothing happened, freezing themselves ideologically.

Over the last eight years, the situation has been quite different. The collapse and ideological disintegration of the “old” working class parties continues. The most recent example was the series of electoral losses of the Austrian Social Democrats, which were transformed from a leading force in national politics into a second-class political organization. But the old parties are being replaced by new forces offering to bring us a fresh air of anti-capitalist alternatives, and they are ready to demonstrate their readiness for radical actions. From 2003 to 2005, these parties were transformed into a major social force.

Nevertheless, it is too early to talk about the revival of the European left. Each time when one or another organization attains considerable success, problems arise. The Italian Communist Refoundation Party was assigned ministerial posts in the Cabinet of Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi, but this government had very little to do with the aspirations of those voters who invested their hopes in the left. Leaders of the Communist Refoundation Party rallied their followers to support Prodi’s administration to avoid a worst-case scenario - political power returning in the hands of a right-wing coalition of Prime Minister-elect Silvio Berlusconi - but this is exactly what happened. Frustrated and angry, voters punished the left in the harshest way. For the first time since World War II, the Communists are not represented in the parliament.

Failures in some countries occur concurrently with the rise of movements in others. The German party Die Linke brought together activists from eastern and western provinces into a single organization for the first time since the country’s unification and it became an important nationwide force. Unlike its predecessor, the Party of Democratic Socialism, which was represented almost exclusively in East Germany, Die Linke participates in the work of provincial parliaments in West Germany. In Greece, the Stalinist Communist Party and democratic Synaspismos are both growing.

Both victories and defeats reflect the same tendency. European society is ripe for transformations, but it does not have a clear outlook of what political trend it should follow. We discover the same trend in the US, where emotional and abstract exhortations to change are in the meantime substituting for a well-defined strategy or program. We can see the same trend in Eastern Europe and even in Russia, where the government itself calls for “social innovations” despite its own proud claims of having attained “stability.”

By making speeches critical of neoliberalism and underscoring the vices of the existing system, the leftists are increasing support for their cause. But this support must be converted into a new political reality - into a program of transformation that is understandable to a significant part of society. Without this program, every time they opt for a policy of the lesser of two evils, this turns into primitive opportunism and a loss of face.

It amounts to a crisis in the movement, which leftist parties themselves are recognizing more and more. It cannot be overcome by just one individual party in a single country. A joint search for a new strategy is needed, but it can only rely on the efforts and accomplishments of individual organizations bold enough to undertake truly radical and forward-looking actions.

In that sense, the global economic crisis may be a good stimulus for creativity. An experiment is a risky affair, but in the midst of a collapsing economy, one must try. **R**

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Party and Movement

Unity and Contradiction

Pratyush Chandra

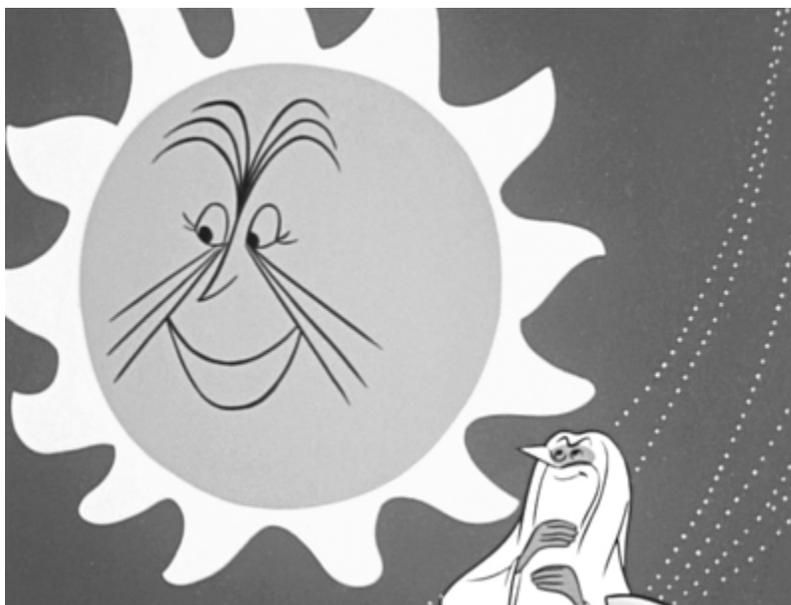
A few months back, a comrade associated with a communist organisation in India circulated a question – “Are there no possibilities of outside-party movements now?” This question is already internationally debated, prominently within a large section of radicals who have either been part of the party-based movements or have struggled fervently against what could be called the party’s tendency to “substitute” the spirit of self-emancipatory struggles through its organisational conservatism and control. However, this question has been reframed in various ways, especially as, “Is there any possibility of party movements now?” The issue has become all the more relevant in the context of recent revolutionary upsurges in Latin America, given the rising scepticism among the traditional left and jubilation among the non-party/post-party left.

Recent arguments and endeavours for building a unified revolutionary party in Venezuela to spearhead the Bolivarian transformation beyond the present stage have once again brought to focus the issues of party, party structure and its relationship to movements. In India, where the ‘communist movement,’ despite its splintering, has been a decisive force both within state politics and radical politics, the question has become significant with mushrooming of diverse varieties of movements independent of party influences. Also, I believe, this question of party

and beyond party has always been a central concern in socialist and working class movements the world over (many times as discussions over the dialectic of spontaneity and organisation).

Any “yes-no” answer to the above-mentioned question is bound to be refuted by counter-examples. In fact, a crucial part of the answer to that question lies in understanding movement, party and party building as processes, in their fluidity, not as fixtures

imposing themselves on the spontaneity of the masses. If a party is organically linked to a movement, then it perpetually recreates itself in the moments of that movement. A revolutionary party is nothing more than an organisation of the militants of a revolutionary movement. You can have a group-structure (well-organised or loose) prior to any movement, but until and unless it refounds itself within the movement, it generally polices the popular energy.



There are innumerable examples of movements throughout the world that can claim to be partyless or above/beyond parties – prominent among them are the Venezuelan, Argentine and Zapatistas in Mexico, anti-globalisation movements etc. However, there are numerous groups, even traditional party structures, operating within most of these movements – but none of them →

individually can claim these movements to be ‘theirs’. What is a movement which is not more than a party? But in the very “organisation” of all these movements, we find a continuous party building process, or rather processes, going on in the attempts to give definite expressions to the goals and visions of the movements.

So, in my opinion, to put it rather schematically, what we witness in the formative processes of a movement is that groups or group-structures (it is immaterial whether they call themselves parties or not) with their own prior movemental experiences come into contact with mass spontaneity - where they are either reborn as groups of “militants” trying to give expression to the movemental needs and goals or they come as predefined structures shaping the movement according to their own fixed needs and goals (for example, to win elections etc).

When I say they “come,” it does not mean that these groups are not there. But their there-ness is defined by the consolidation and institutionalisation of their prior experiences, gains and failures. During these latter processes, these groups either congeal as having interests which are now accommodated within the system or they are ready to unlearn and relearn during the course of new struggles of the oppressed and the exploited. In the first case, they are there as part of the hegemony or as its agencies (conscious or subconscious) and in the second case, they are “reborn” as groups or parties of militants, of organic intellectuals - intellectuals organically linked to the working class, as Gramsci would put.

On this perpetual making and remaking of the organisation and party within and with relation to movements, Marx made a very interesting observation in his letter to Friedrich Bolte (November 23, 1871), where he recapitulates the role and problems of the First International:

“The political movement of the working class has as its object, of course, the conquest of political power for the working class, and for this it is naturally necessary that a previous organisation of the working class, itself arising from their economic struggles, should have been developed up to a certain point... Out of the separate economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a political movement, that is to say a movement of the class, with the object of achieving its interests in a general form, in

a form possessing a general social force of compulsion. If these movements presuppose a certain degree of previous organisation, they are themselves equally a means of the development of this organisation.”

It is important to remember and grasp the dialectics of Marx’s dual assertion about the need of a communist party, on the one hand, and what, as Engels asserted in his 1888 preface of the English edition of the Communist Manifesto, “the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself”. The latter was already there in the General Rules of the First International (“That the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves”). In his Critique of Gotha Programme too, while criticising the Lasalleans, Marx says, “The international activity of the working classes does not in any way depend on the existence of the International Working Men’s Association.” Marx clearly rejects here any substitutionist tendency, which has been rampant within the workers and peasants’ movements in India and elsewhere, as the ‘vanguard’ organisations

attempt to “possess” movements. A striking example is the following quote from the party programme of the largest constituent of the parliamentary left in India:

“The people’s democratic front cannot successfully be built and the revolution cannot attain victory except under the leadership of the working class and its political party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist).”

In the above-quoted letter to Bolte, Marx made a very illuminating remark

on the function of sectism within the working class movement, which can be a lesson for all of us today:

“The International was founded in order to replace the Socialist or semi-Socialist sects by a real organisation of the working class for struggle. ... The Internationalists could not have maintained themselves if the course of history had not already smashed up the sectarian system. The development of the system of Socialist sects and that of the real workers’ movement always stand in inverse ratio to each other. So long as the sects are (historically) justified, the working class is not yet ripe for an independent historic movement. As soon as it has attained this maturity all sects are essentially reactionary. Nevertheless what history has shown everywhere was repeated within the International. The antiquated makes an attempt to re-establish and maintain itself within the newly achieved form.”



As the most recent and clear example of “the antiquated” making an “attempt to re-establish and maintain itself within the newly achieved form” are, what Michael Lebowitz calls, the “glum faces” in reaction to Chavez’s call for a unified party in Venezuela. To resist the replacement of “the Socialist or semi-Socialist sects by a real organisation of the working class for struggle” at the time when the working class has attained maturity is “essentially reactionary.”

In India, too, at the grassroots level the labouring classes have time and again come together and demonstrated their will and energy to move beyond the systemic logic, but the presence of the “antiquated” becomes a hurdle in transforming this solidarity into a decisive challenge to the system. This hurdle is perpetuated by schematically subordinating the working class consciousness (dubbed “economistic”) to the “politics” of parties. The party becomes an organisation above class rather than “the organisation of what already exists within the class” (Mario Tronti), in other words, as the organisation of class capacity. Hence the issue of class seizure and control of production apparatuses and means of production as a challenge to capitalist hegemony transforming the social relations is relegated to a secondary level, while the issue of ensuring formal political consolidation and stability in a competitive set-up becomes the end of party politics. The issue of posing class alternatives to capitalist regime of accumulation is sidelined in the process of the “accumulation of power.”

However, this “antiquated” cannot be fought by wishing away the notion of “party,” it can only be done by viewing party building as a process with all its contradictions and as a continuous class struggle, including against internalised hegemonies – against labour aristocrats and party bureaucrats.

West Bengal

In West Bengal (in fact, everywhere in India) the working class and the poor peasantry have outgrown the traditional left. This is not something new and to be lamented upon. It always happens that organisations develop according to the contemporary needs of the class struggle and are bound to be institutionalised, and even coopted, becoming hurdles for further battles, not able to channel their forces for new exigencies of class dynamics and struggle. This happens because in the process of a struggle a major segment devoted to the needs of this struggle is caught-up

in the networks it has established for their fulfillment. It is unable to detach itself from the fruits of the struggle, therefore losing its vitality and is overwhelmed by the existential needs.

In the name of consolidation of movemental gains, what is developed is a kind of ideologisation, a fetish - organisation for organisation’s sake. This leads to the cooption of the organisation and its leadership in the hegemonic setup (obviously not just in the formal apparatuses), which in turn, due to struggles, has to concede some space to new needs and aspirations. In fact, this is how capitalism reproduces itself politically. And this is how societal hegemonies gain agencies within radical organisations and are organisationally internalised - developing aristocracies and bureaucracies.

Two important points regarding the recent agitations in West Bengal can be fruitful for us in understanding the above-mentioned dynamics:

1) As prominent Marxist-Feminist historian Tanika Sarkar says, “an amazing measure of peasant self-confidence and self-esteem that we saw at Singur and at Nandigram” is a result of whatever limited land reforms the Left Front (LF) initiated and is in the “very long and rich tradition of the Left politics and culture.”

2) The price of state power that helped sustain this was the cooption of the LF in the hegemonic policy regime, which is neoliberal for now. So the vested interests that developed during these struggles and cooption led to a situation where “beyond registration of sharecroppers and some land redistribution, no other forms of agrarian restructuring were imagined.” Also, “industries were allowed to die away, leaving about 50,000 dead factories and the virtual collapse of the jute industry,” as competition and the flight of capital were not challenged (which probably in the federal setup of India could not be challenged) by questioning the nature of production relations.

However, there is no fatalism in the above view – the radical vitality of an organisation/party is contingent upon the sharpening of struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic tendencies within an organisation, which in turn is embedded within the overall class struggle, i.e., it all depends on class balance and struggle within an organisation. **R**

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Critique of the Arab Left

On Palestine and Arab Unity

Hisham Bustani

The situation of the Arab Left is similar to “the phenomenon of the transformation of the Left” on the global scale and a reflection of it. The reason is simple: the Arab Left, as a general rule though with some exceptions, was never a “Left” in the dialectical materialist sense. It has always been a reserved, conservative entity, “reactionary” rather than proactive, “importing” theory rather than producing it, adhering to the “letter of the text” (mainly the text of the Soviet policy!) rather than being an innovative critical thinker.

Below I attempt to dissect the main weaknesses of the Arab Left, as well as the obstacles it faced, and discuss whether there really was an Arab Left at all. This is of special importance since, coming from a Marxist position itself, criticism will help in evolving a revolutionary Left again in the Arab region and the world.

Under the British and French occupation, the division of al-Mashreq al-Arabi (the Arab East, divided by colonialists into the states we know today as Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq) took place for many objective reasons:

(a) “Divide and Rule,” a doctrine that is a well-known mechanism for depriving people of the power to change and diverting their political energy into internal channels (channels within the manufactured benign system), thus facilitating the job of the occupier and tremendously impeding any effort towards unifying the Arab masses – the only mechanism that can lead to the defeat of imperialism. Also through this doctrine, colonialist occupation will have a “new function” to undertake as it transforms its image and presumable function from an oppressor to a buffer between internal divisions, a trick that makes the occupation a “necessity.”

(b) Pave the way for the implantation of an imperialist base, a functional entity that can serve imperialism and comprise a material barrier between the Eastern and Western wings of the Arab space. Let us not forget that the greatest attempts for an Arab liberation project started by uniting the Eastern and Western sides of the Arab homeland – Syria and Egypt. That was the case with Saladin, who united Damascus and Egypt in 1174, paving the way for ending the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1187. It was also the case with Mohammed Ali Pasha (1769-1848), known for his industrialization and modernization plan to establish a strong state in the Arab region. He united Egypt and Syria and was forced to eliminate his project by the British and Austrian naval attacks. And then Nasser (1918-1970), in his attempt to set up a truly

independent sovereign Arab state, also succeeded in unifying Egypt and Syria as a backbone for an Arab unity, but for many reasons, the unity lasted only for less than three years, from 1958 to 1961.(c) Keep these manufactured “states” under continuous subordination to imperialism, since it is impossible to achieve liberation on the level of the manufactured state (lack of resources to establish independent development and lack of political and popular depth to support a liberation project are among other objective reasons for its impossibility).

The climax of the colonialist drive for division and maintenance of the state of subordination was the establishment and legitimization of the Zionist entity (Israel): a racist colonial-settler entity organically and functionally attached to the imperialist powers.

There is no objective reason whatsoever that might convince a leftist to acknowledge and accept the establishment of such an entity; on the contrary, the logic of Marxist theory and its developments concretely leads to conclusions against such an acknowledgement. There is an exception, of course, and that is the case of a Left that is completely mechanical and under the influence of a center that acts more like a superpower than a revolutionary center.

The Soviet Union accepted the U.N.-sponsored Partition Plan of 1947, thus accepting the material manifestation of the Zionist/imperialist project in the Arab region. Subsequently, almost all Arab Communist Parties accepted what the Soviets agreed to without any critical objection! Moreover, there are reports that the Syrian Communist Party, (the most mature of the Arab Communist Parties at the time), having printed its paper with headlines in objection to the proposed Partition Plan, had to throw all that batch in the garbage and print another edition with a reverse position after the Soviet agreement to the plan!

From that point on, Arab Communist Parties had to become a sort of “devil’s advocate,” defending the existence of “Israel,” and fabricating/promoting all sorts of theories about a “unity of the Arab and Jewish working class” in Palestine. That was and remains a theoretical joke that demanded the unity of the oppressed and occupied with their colonial-settler occupiers and oppressors under the banner of “working-class unity” against imperialism!

Palestinian Communists formed “united” parties composed of Arabs and colonialist-settler Zionists, self-proclaimed Communists, while other Arab Communists maintained a close relationship and sought to coordinate with this Zionist “Left” and still do today.

On March 2006, the Jordanian Communist Party held a coordination meeting with the Israeli Communist Party in Amman, an example of many that may have taken place unbeknownst to others over the years. Yet that meeting, not so strangely, was even a subject of boast in the JCP’s official newspaper! While it is strange enough to be a “Communist” and an “Israeli” at the same time, the two parties obviously had no political conflict, since both of them promote the notion that the occupation of Arab land (1948-occupied land) and the establishing of a functional racist colonial-settler entity on that land is just and acceptable, provided the Zionists give back part of the land (occupied later in 1967) for the Palestinians to establish a fragmented totally subordinate “state,” the so-called “two-state solution,” an unjust proposal for ending the Arab-Zionist struggle that is used for maintaining the status quo through a never-ending “peace process” and pushing the entire world to accept injustice (Israel) as a normal legitimate state of affairs. Both the JCP and the ICP agree on this solution as their strategy, a coincidence that links them up with the main-

stream political agenda globally. Even the U.S. and “Israeli” governments seem to be hooked on the “two-state solution,” a strange agreement with “Communist” strategy!

It is ironic that, although Arab Communists were keen on coordinating and forming unified fronts with “Israeli Communists,” a similar effort was not undertaken towards Iranian and Turkish Communists, despite the fact that, unlike “Israelis,” the people of Iran and Turkey are the historic neighbors of Arabs, and they are an integral ally, and an integral part of an anti-imperialist anti-Zionist struggle.

Some of the Arab Communists were pioneers in crafting terms like “political sensibility” and “understanding the balance of powers.” Such terms have become part of the theoretical arsenal for parties and regimes alike who no longer wanted to “liberate Palestine” but rather to follow whatever the Israel/USA couple would put forward, an endeavor that has led us to the pathetic result we see today in Palestine.

The Communists, under the influence of the Soviets, were also the first to accept U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 that further establishes “Israel” as a legitimate state, ordering Arabs to forget about their land occupied before 1967 and terming only

Arab land occupied after 1967 as “occupied territories” (under the UN banner, there was no occupation before 1967 — history does not exist before that year).

The Soviet Union tried to push everybody to accept resolution 242. Mjalli Nasrawin, head of the International Relations Department of the Ba’ath Party and member of its National Leadership Board during the 1960s, reports that, in November 1969, the Soviet ambassador in Syria, Nuradin Mukhitdinov, demanded that the party (ruling Syria at that time) accept Resolution 242. Nasrawin recalls that weeks later the party received a letter signed by the Soviet leadership troika Brezhnev, Podgorny, and Kosygin, stating that the Soviets consider the decision not to accept Resolution 242 on Palestine a threat to global peace and that, if the current Ba’ath party leadership did not accept this resolution, the Soviets would cease all support for them.

The Ba’ath Party leadership did not have to wait long to experience the Soviet cessation of support. →



Cartoon by Salah Jaheen: “It is one of the faults of the Arab Socialist Union that all ideas are coming from the top.”



In of the 10th Extraordinary National Party Conference in late 1970, Hafez el-Assad (then the Minister of Defense and leading a pro-242 faction in the Ba’th Party) was voted out of office. Nasrawin recalls that al-Assad immediately left the conference and staged a military coup. Within hours, the Soviet Ambassador met with party leader Salah Jdeid and informed him that, if he accepted Resolution 242, the Soviets would back the leadership of the party; otherwise the Soviets would not intervene. Jdeid refused, and within hours Hafez al-Assad declared “the corrective movement,” his epithet for his military coup against the leadership of his own Ba’th party. Party leaders were all arrested and ended up serving 20-years-plus in jail. Mjalli Nasrawin was released after serving 23 years in prison. Other leaders were not so lucky. Salah Jdeid and Noor ed-Din Atasi left prison for their graves.

It is worth mentioning that the ousted Ba’th Party leadership in 1970 was the democratic progressive leftist element, refusing to eliminate al-Asad and his faction militarily, despite previous knowledge of his intentions, and promoting the necessity of a Marxist theory and practice to become the strategy of the party, as opposed to romantic socialism/nationalism promoted by other factions.

If these were the Soviet demands and pressures on the Ba’th Party, one can imagine their demands and pressures on the Arab Communist Parties regarding the issue of Palestine, the central issue of Arab liberation.

The Arab Communist Parties are not the only ones to blame for their lack of vision and analysis. Self-proclaimed Marxist organizations had also moved away in their strategy from liberation to “two states.” Those are the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The DFLP was a pioneer in proposing “stages” in the struggle for liberation. This paved the way for strategic concessions being portrayed as “necessary stages” in the struggle. The PFLP, having a much more progressive position, and being at the forefront of military resistance at one time in the history of struggle, took some time before it also withdrew into the rhetoric of “stages” and “two states,” now their official political line.

It is clearly seen now (with some exceptions) that the organized Arab Left – Communist Parties, the PFLP, and the DFLP – have all succumbed to “political rationality” and detached themselves from an uncompromising objective theory and struggle, paving the way for the rise of Islamist organizations that still insist on “liberation” and “refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Zionist entity” and practice armed resistance at the same time.

Another major mistake of the Arab Communists was their lack of clarity on the issue of Arab unity. Being a peculiar case in history, Arabs moved directly from the stage of a 600-year-long Ottoman oppression before WWI to the stage of colonialist occupation and division following WWI. It is elementary that frag-

mentation is a tool of subordination: this is true of the working class (thus the call for unity of the workers), and it is also true of fragmented people who have yet to acquire their national existence, for whom a classical capitalist social structure with its relevant class structure is far from being an objective reality. It is only simple sense that a call for the divided Arab toilers to unite in the struggle against Zionism and imperialism, and against the subordinate client Arab regimes that safeguard this division, breaking the colonialist-drawn division lines, should have been a priority for the Arab Left.

While Arab Communists, driven by a metaphysical Arab-Zionist “workers’ unity” plan, were far away from the main struggle, making no actual effort on the issue of Arab unity as a main propeller for a successful confrontation, pan-Arabist organizations started to evolve into Marxism, proving objectively that Arab unity must have a class nature, must adopt Socialism to accomplish liberation, and must be an anti-chauvinist, all-encompassing secular effort for all the oppressed people in the Arab region. In this sense, the influential Arab Nationalists Movement of the 1950s gave life to the Marxist PFLP, and the Ba’th Party evolved a progressive leftist leadership in Syria ousted by the 1970 right-wing military coup.

The Arab Communists’ position on Palestine and Arab unity, a product of mechanical subordination to the Soviet center and lack of critical theory and analysis, is solid proof that a “Left” was never born in the classical Communist Parties. In fact, those parties hindered and sometimes fought against critical thinkers who came from within the establishment.

This long history has prepared the road to NGO transition for many Communists and Communist Parties in the Arab region, following the “liberal wave” on the global Left after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the elimination of the Soviet Union, the political godfather of the Arab Communist Parties. (Of course, exceptions, like the Lebanese Communist Party, still exist, but the argument concerns general phenomena.) Furthermore, following this line of history will also temper the sense of astonishment that might arise from seeing the collaboration of the Iraqi Communist Party with the U.S. occupiers, and their integration within the occupation-dominated political process, while being backed by other Arab Communist Parties like the Jordanian CP.

It is only logical that the Arab Left is a very weak entity at the moment, divided between two main camps:

1. A classical Communist camp that continues along the political line of its predecessor, with “liberal” additions: promoting a “two-state” solution in Palestine, having a deep faith in imperialist-imposed “democratic processes” such as the one in post-occupation Iraq, joining the agendas of NGOs and accepting their funding, and fighting for its own political existence rather than a political program and ideology. This line is deeply rooted in historical organization (of Communist Parties and similar

structures);

2. A critical neo-Marxist camp that, although present and active, is unorganized and divided, mainly because it is comprised of individuals who left the classical official structures without finding an alternative or building one.

Although I don’t like the term personally, and prefer the term “Unity Left,” the critical neo-Marxist camp is often referred to as “Nationalist Left,” opposed to the liberal “Democratic Left” (a malformed equivalent of Europe’s Social Democrats) or the classical “Communist Left.”

This new critical Left has clear views on:

- (a) Palestine – the core of the Arab liberation struggle and not a mere Palestinian-Israeli conflict, an uncompromised struggle for existence between the Arab liberation project and the Zionist/imperialist project, cannot be resolved by “political processes” and cannot be resolved by maintaining a Zionist entity on any part of Arab land;

- (b) Iraq – not recognizing U.S. occupation and any political process that follows from it);

- (c) Resistance – unconditional support to all forms of resistance, including armed resistance;

- (d) Unity of the Arab struggle – the impossibility of liberation on the level of the weak, subordinate colonially-manufactured current Arab state.

- (e) Necessity of forming anti-Imperialist fronts based on clear political strategies with forces that share this approach though not particularly leftist (like Islamists, nationalists, etc.).

Through a polarization between those two camps – an effort that should extend globally on the basis of political clarity – a new radical, militant, clear and revolutionary Left can be born, and again become a key player in the liberation process, in the Arab region, and the world. **R**

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Portugal

A Way Forward In Resisting Neoliberalism & Regrouping the Left

Portugal is “the sick man of Europe” states the weekly *Economist*. With a 2007 GDP growth rate of only 1.5%, among the worst in Western Europe and much lower than its closest neighbour, Spain, unemployment hovers at 10%, the highest in two decades. One result has been a mass emigration of skilled workers. The dreams of the 1974 ‘Carnation Revolution’ are long gone and have been displaced by malaise and crisis. Within this contemporary and historical context the Left Bloc emerged.

The ‘Carnation Revolution’ of April 25th, 1974 brought to an end nearly 50 years of military-authoritarian rule in Portugal. Left-leaning mid-rank officers, organized as the Movement of the Armed Forces (MFA), initiated a coup which set in motion the pent up social and political energy of Portugal’s long oppressed working class. The MFA did not possess a detailed political program and therefore was less than homogeneous in terms of political goals. It was united around the goal of moving Portugal toward a minimal level of democracy, but beyond that there was little agreement.

The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) had been the only large and ongoing underground resistance to the dictatorship and emerged as the most highly organized political party in the country. So effective had the party been as a clandestine organization, that in the days following April 25th, unsuspecting friends and neighbours discovered that they had belonged to the party together. Trade unions rapidly organized, typically under PCP leadership, and worker’s and neighbourhood commissions sprung up. The PCP, in the trade unions and in the popular commissions, became more concerned with consolidating its own new found power by creating well-structured organizations. In this respect it served as a brake on efforts to push the process toward socialist transformation.

In large part as a rejection of the limited vision of both the MFA and PCP, new political formations on the Left emerged and took hold. There were two revolutionary tendencies present here – popular power parties which sought to direct the spontaneous forces unleashed in workplaces and neighbourhoods and a variety of Maoist parties. While small, these various parties (Left Socialist Movement, the Revolutionary Party of the Proletariat, the PCP (Reconstructed), the PCP (M-L), the Movement to Reorganize the Proletarian Party, and the Popular Democratic Union) were not without influence. They tended to fill the void left by PCP inaction. And it is these organizations of the left-wing of the

‘Carnation Revolution’ which are the early political antecedents of the Left Bloc.

In the midst of a recession which began in 2003 and a series of natural disasters appearing in recent summers – extensive fires in two thirds of its mainland regions which destroyed much of its forests – Portugal has been under an intense neoliberal offensive to lower working peoples’ standard of living by privatizing state institutions and lowering the social wage, an offensive led and administered by a social democratic government, similar to that of Tony Blair/George Brown in Britain. The Socialist Party, socialist in name only, took office two years ago, winning a majority of seats in parliament. Such is the continuing political crisis, governments usually last an average of two years.

This government faces massive protests from public sector workers as it attempts to be “fiscally responsible” to comply with EU membership. It has attempted to prevent pay raises and has rolled back social spending, reminiscent of Bob Rae and the NDP in Ontario in the early nineties. Recently it sold off Portugal Telecom and, in an attack on the pension system, increased the retirement age.

Again, much as in the days following April 25th 1974, it is in a context of impasse and betrayal that the Left Bloc has increased its influence among working people. Launched in 1999, initially a coalition of left-wing political groups, it has increased its support in every election since then and now has the formal status of a party. Today it has eight Members of Parliament, one Member of the European Parliament and over 350 municipal councilors throughout the country. It has been in the forefront in the streets in resisting the capitalist offensive and winning important reforms on the right to abortion; the Left Bloc shows what can be achieved when socialist and anti-capitalists put aside their differences to fight a common enemy. What follows is an interview that first appeared in the January 2008 issue of *International Viewpoint*.

An Interview with Francisco Louca of the Left Bloc

On June 2-3, 2007 the Fifth National Convention of the Left Bloc took place in Lisbon. Since its creation in 1999, this unitary organization of the anti-capitalist Left in Portugal has strongly consolidated itself and has established a presence in the country.

Today it has become a significant force, with 4,200 members, an active presence in struggles and social movements, as well as 350 local councillors and 8 members of Parliament. The following interview with Francisco Louça was conducted on July 7, 2007.

Q: The Left Bloc is a pluralist party of the socialist Left. How does it define itself in relation to the hard core of the socialist programme, in the strong sense of the term, i.e. to the socialization of the large-scale means of production, distribution, credit, etc? How do you tackle the key question of property in your programme? Is it possible to refound an anti-capitalist left without taking a clear position on this question?

A: When the Bloc was formed, eight years ago, we made a political choice which I believe is still valid: to create our party on the basis of the political confrontations which define our activity and not on the basis of a priori ideological cohesion. We thus brought together very different traditions, coming from the Communist Party, Maoist or revolutionary Marxist (Trotskyist) currents, as well as people from independent social movements. The possibility of building this regroupment, in a very defensive situation, implied that we were able to formulate political proposals and to have an impact on society. So started not by discussing a programme of historical reference, but a programme of political intervention. We defined ourselves as socialists shortly after our foundation, in a double sense: initially, by rejecting “real socialism” (Stalinism, the experiences of the USSR, Eastern Europe or China), then by identifying ourselves with the anti-capitalist struggle, against the social-democratic experience and its current social-liberal version.

In this sense, we defend the idea of collective ownership. But what is really important, in particular for the organizations which followed the path of small minority groups, is to find the means of expressing political ideas which fight to have an influence on the masses. So we translated our socialist ideas into specific proposals, very much linked to the modalities of political life in Portugal.

For example, we recently proposed the socialization of the services of water, energy, etc, and one of our principal campaigns this year centres on the defence, the modernization and the transformation of the national health service. That enables us to concretize our perspective of socialization on the basis of social needs and concrete struggles.

Q: Reading the majority resolution of your June congress, we can see a quite clear difference between the way in which you tackle social questions and environmental questions. On social questions, you put forward defensive demands - refusal of privatizations, defence of a social security system that meets the needs of everyone, etc. -, therefore an anti-liberal programme, compatible with a left Keynesian perspective. On environmental questions, you point out that we cannot answer a problem as serious as climatic disorder without challenging the very logic of capitalism. It seems to me that your approach becomes more radical here, including in the way you choose to formulate things. Is there not here a tension between a minimal social programme, which corresponds to the defence of “possible” objectives – in fact, the term is used on several occasions - and the need to seriously break with capitalism, in particular on ecological questions?

A: On all questions, the only coherent strategy is to break with capitalism. We do not share a left Keynesian perspective, because it is a perspective that is based on the market, a perspective which had a material base in the capitalist systems after the Second World War, but which is no longer possible today. We defend on the contrary the idea that the Left, our Left at least, has fight to develop the consciousness and the capacity for action of people, without limiting itself to making propaganda for socialism. Actually, the idea that the only practical alternative is socialism, which cannot be an immediate objective, leads to a perturbation of the thinking of the Left. In order to fight, you have to demand everything, and yet... everything is not possible. We have to break this crazy mirror!

If the central objective of the European bourgeoisies, at least of the Portuguese bourgeoisie, is to suppress part of the indirect wages of workers and to take for itself revenue from taxation, from the socialized part of the state, that forces to us to defend public services as a democratic gain for which we are collectively responsible, and to win the majority of the population to such an objective.

This battle is not defensive! It is the most offensive battle that you can think of, since by putting forward proposals that are specific, and thus possible, people can see that they are applicable. It is what we do in the fields of health and social security. For example, faced with the biggest initiative of this government with a Socialist majority, that is, the reform of social security, we were the only party to present a concrete alternative in terms of →



methods of financing, the role of taxation or the way services were divided up between the generations. That gave us a very big impact, because everyone could understand that the only argument of the partisans of a liberalization of social security - that it is the only viable alternative - was erroneous. We have to fight clearly for that ground.

Having said that, our congress developed a basic position on the question of the environment that was more programmatic, centred on climatic disturbances, undoubtedly because it was the first time that we had done it. We had to explain why market solutions -the “Al Gore way” - lead to a dead end from the point of view of the transformation of habits of consumption, forms of production, distribution of wealth, North-South relations, etc. That is why we chose a more educational approach.

Q: In the last 20 to 25 years, the cumulative results of neo-liberal policies, the policies of really existing capitalism, have produced a social regression whose effects on class consciousness have been profound. So we can note a general retreat of solidarity to the advantage of “everyone for themselves”, which is the expression of the increasing influence of bourgeois ideology... Broad sectors of society are more atomised than ever and are experiencing head-on the material and ideological offensive of capital. This situation favours the multiplication of all sorts of divisions, between those in work and the unemployed, between those who have a permanent job and those in precarious work, between natives of a country and immigrants, old and young, men and women, etc... This general weakening of capacities of resistance marks a qualitative degradation of the relationship of forces. In such a context, to resist durably implies not only organising the social movement around anti-liberal objectives, but also rebuilding it, which supposes the redefinition of a horizon of radical social transformation - what socialism meant for the working-class movement before the Second World War... What do you think about that?

A: It seems to me that the left does not have a very complete answer to this question, because the only possible answer will have to be based on social experience, on the creation of new

traditions of struggle. But I believe that there are two elements for a reply. First of all, the capacity for political initiative; secondly, the organization of new social networks, new forms of social intervention. I believe that the key to the strategy of the socialist Left is to take back the initiative and go on the offensive, where it is possible, and to always maintain this orientation. I greatly respect the militants and the tradition of the European radical Left, but I believe that if a party is not able to establish itself as a reference in national political debates, in particular by its capacity for initiative, it will fail. It is absolutely necessary to build this capacity for political action that becomes a reference.

I can give you two examples in our history. The Bloc was formed in 1999, at a moment when, in spite of the rising tide of liberalism, individualism and the privatization of consciousness, Portugal experienced a rather unique movement of solidarity with the people of Timor, not yet independent and under the military pressure of Indonesia: a nation-wide strike, street demonstrations lasting all day, therefore a mobilization which was not an expression of material interests. How was such a capacity for commitment and initiative possible in an overall defensive climate? The answer is political: certain tensions can make possible important initiatives on concrete themes.

Furthermore, very recently, we won a referendum on abortion with a majority of 60% in favour of one of the most advanced laws in Europe, and that in a very Catholic country, where the weight of the Church on the political world is very strong. That is explained by the capacity for initiative of the supporters of decriminalisation. We were able to divide the centre and the Right, to draw right-wing members of Parliament in behind the movement, and on a key theme: how could we continue to imprison women who have had abortions? That completely changed the terms of reference of the political debate. So it is necessary to be wary of attitudes that are apparently very radical, but which actually lead to a wait-and-see policy, because nothing seems possible. No, many things are possible... on condition that we make choices and create a relationship of forces by taking the initiative where it is possible to take steps forward.

Fundamentally, I believe that you are right. We have to envisage a major reorganization of the social movement in the 21st century. In reality, it will be difficult for the trade unions to organise precarious workers. It is necessary to create other types of networks and social organizations. We have some experiences in this regard. For example, we organised a march for jobs, one year ago, which crisscrossed the country. There were two to three public meetings every day, with many workers present. Sometimes, the workers of companies that were going bankrupt or threatened with closure contacted us. We took this problem very seriously, because there is more or less 10 per cent unemployment in Portugal. And the workers do not see an alternative, because it is difficult. However, in some cases, we obtained significant gains. Militants of the Left Bloc are in the leadership of the workers' commission of one of the most important factories in the country, Volkswagen, in the south of Lisbon, which employs several thousand workers. There, the workers agreed to give up wage increases so that several hundred precarious workers in the factory could be given permanent contracts. That reinforced confidence in solutions of solidarity, and this in an extremely defensive context.

Q: At the end of the 20th century, the global justice movement represented an element of rupture in the field of ideas. So we saw the appearance of a new form of internationalism. Nevertheless, the difficulty that this movement has had in engaging in large-scale social mobilizations also shows some of its limits. Your congress document highlights two European examples – the mobilizations of youth against the CPE in France and of Greek students against the Bologna reforms - which would not have been conceivable without the precedent of the global justice movement. But such examples remain limited. Without large-scale social mobilizations, don't you see a danger that the global justice movement goes round in circles, and that its demonstrations and forums become rituals, without liberating the capacities of social initiative that are essential to a counter-offensive?

A: This danger exists. But the global justice movement nevertheless had an impressive success by showing itself to be capable of organizing an international movement against the war on the basis of new forms of organization that were very attractive and very productive. It made possible the expression of a mass movement of millions of people, which was a decisive factor in beginning to confront imperialism and war. Having said that, you are right, it encounters a real difficulty in organizing broad social sectors. In Portugal, the global justice movement has been much more important as a laboratory of ideas than as a movement capable of organization and initiative.

There were two Portuguese Social Forums, but they were of very modest proportions: the first one was certainly a little less so, thanks to the involvement of the trade-union confederation on a unitary line, but the second was limited to a few hundred people, because of the Communist Party's obsessive desire to control the whole process, which dissuaded many social organizations from taking part in it. This narrow-minded attitude has had an effect on the capacity for autonomous intervention of the global justice movement in Portugal. There-

fore, the social forums, as organized movements, did not have any influence in Portugal.

Q: Although the international anti-war movement was a spectacular consequence of the global justice movement, it was directed above all against US imperialism and George W. Bush's policy of war without end. Didn't it nourish illusions on the peaceful character of the European imperialisms? Your last congress criticized any support for the intervention of European troops – from Portugal as well as other countries - in Afghanistan. What do you think of the turn of the majority of Rifondazione in Italy in favour of the continuation of the military interventions of NATO member states, provided that they have been approved by the UN, in particular in Afghanistan or, in another context, in Lebanon?

A: It is true that the anti-war movement developed against US and British imperialism. Obviously the positions taken by Chirac and Schröder nourished illusions. But I believe that this division of the imperialist front was also the product of the mobilization of public opinion against the war. It is thus also a success to have paralysed the capacity for unification of the various imperialisms around US super-imperialism. That said, there are today obviously important political debates.

In Italy, I believe that Rifondazione is speaking a double language: in the government, it accepts the imperialist intervention in Afghanistan, whereas in the European Left Party, it approves resolutions in favour of the withdrawal of all troops from Afghanistan. And this double language is also found in Italy: you cannot take part in a demonstration against the extension of an American base then, a few days afterwards, vote in favour of the same project. People understand that there is a contradiction and that has created a problem between Rifondazione and the anti-war movement.

And yet, the role of Rifondazione was very important at the head of the anti-war movement, and that was one of its strong points in 2003-2004. There is a deficit here which is leading to a very dangerous situation, because a political party must be very clear about its objectives, in particular on war and peace, which are decisive questions in the life of the people. The best tradition of the socialist movement is clear on this subject, from Jaurès to Rosa Luxemburg. There is no such thing as a left-wing policy which is not clear in its opposition to war, militarism and imperialism.

Q: The Left Bloc is a coming together of the anti-liberal socialist Left, but without the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP). However, at the European level, the Bloc belongs to the European Left Party, which is dominated by forces coming from the communist movement. How do you explain that the PCP has followed a separate path from that of the Bloc, and that your documents make hardly any mention of it?

The Bloc was built in opposition to liberal policies, therefore in opposition to the Socialist Party, but also to the PCP. We represent a third force, alternative by its programme and its capacity for initiative. Our strategic goal is to reconstruct the relationship →

of forces within the Left and in society as a whole. In Portugal, the Communist Party, as in some other countries, represents a form of organization in the Stalinist tradition, in which it is the party that directs the trade unions, in which there are movements to organize women and young people.

That does not make it possible for trade unions to represent workers in a unitary fashion and restricts their capacity to organize precarious workers, as well as other social layers. The social force of the PCP depends primarily on this type of party control of the trade-union movement. So it was necessary for us to break with this conception, which weakens the popular movement. It was to contribute to rebuilding the capacity for initiative of this movement that the Bloc was organized as a political and social force.

So we have relations of confrontation, of debate, but sometimes also of convergence with the Communist Party, even if we defend a clearly alternative vision. The PCP was the party of the Soviet Union throughout its entire history; now, it is the party of the Chinese Communist Party. It is not comparable to the split in the Italian Communist Party which gave rise to Rifondazione Comunista.

As regards the European Left Party, to which we belong, it should be said that the European Communist Parties are divided. The European Left Party has a non-Stalinist conception, a conception of opening out, of being a network, not a Comintern-style conception. The PCP is not part of it. We do not obey the European Left Party.

None of its decisions is binding on us. It is a network of collaboration that depends on the positions of the national parties. The Red-Green Alliance in Denmark and Respect in England are associated with it... The Communist Parties which form part of it have been transformed, a little bit or a lot, while the PCP is trying to develop a parallel network, with parties of the East, the Chinese, Vietnamese, Cuban Communist Parties, etc.

Q: The Left bloc has obtained a growing number of elected representatives, in the national Parliament as well as in the municipalities. With 350 municipal councillors, it has nearly 10% of its members in elected assemblies. Does this not pose a problem for you, insofar as the weight of these elected representatives can tend to adapt your political priorities and activities to those of these institutions, to the detriment of the priority needs of the social movement. Not to mention the impact that elective mandates can have in terms of material and symbolic privileges, which are of course extremely reduced. How does the Bloc organize itself to build bulwarks against such dangers?

A: As you know it, since you also have elected representatives in Switzerland, if a party stands for election and that results in it winning seats, it must fill them where it obtained those votes. In bourgeois democracy, every mass party will have elected representatives and political polarization can be expressed through electoral gains, even though defeats and retreats are inevitable.

In Portugal, our elected councillors do not receive wages and take part in municipal meetings only once week in the big cities, and once a month – or even twice a year - in the small towns. They also participate in some commissions. The local councils have very little power: they are forums for political discussion. We also have members elected to municipal executives, which are elected according to proportional representation. They are generally not in the majority, except in a small town of some 30,000 people, close to Lisbon.



Francisco Louçã

It is true that the fact of having these councillors leads to a demand for political answers to local questions. These questions are also important - housing, transport, public services, education, etc. Some of them are directly related to financial and budgetary policy, but also to the organization of society in the whole of the country, which makes it possible to develop an opposition that is better informed on local conditions.

This obliges us to concentrate a lot of effort and a lot of cadres on municipal matters. Indeed we have to do this work while trying to get out from the four walls of the municipal assemblies in order to explain to the population what is involved in the current confrontations. The PCP on the contrary often allies with the Right in order to obtain posts in the municipal executive, because the Socialist Party and the parties that are in power form a dominant bloc.

This explains why the PCP takes part in municipal governments with the Right and the far Right in several large cities, such as Oporto, Sintra and Coimbra. But what is most important is to maintain a national political profile around central campaigns. For example, over the last year, we have concentrated the bulk of our forces on the march for jobs, directly confronting the employers and the government, as we did in the battle for abortion. The Bloc is widely recognized for that!

Q: The Bloc has made it possible to amalgamate quite different political currents. Not only from new forces and the new genera-

tions, but also from older traditions – Marxist-Leninists, Trotskyists, forces coming from minorities in the PCP, etc. Has the progress of the Bloc been made possible by collaboration between these forces?

A: I wouldn't like to generalise. Portuguese conditions are undoubtedly not extendable to other European countries. In France, for example, the LCR is discussing a broad anti-capitalist party. The experience of SolidaritéS in Switzerland is also different. But what is common to many of these experiences and debates on the European Left, is the will to create a political framework that is broader, more offensive, capable of organizing social activists, of representing both a political and social Left.

The path that we have chosen rests basically on the confidence that can be built in the process of constituting a collective leadership on the basis of common political tasks. This confidence has to be tested in the course of our activity, in our successes and our setbacks, going through an apprenticeship of a will to integrate the various trends and to seek consensus and cohesion. If that succeeds, it becomes possible to engage in politics.

There is indeed a great difference between making propaganda, developing ideas, defending a programme, even of a high quality, and being able to transform that into a political weapon by involving broader social sectors in struggle, by mobilizing them. New forces are coming to us because we have convictions, because we make campaigns, because we give examples of battles to be conducted, because we discuss new ways of organizing ourselves on the left. We reach thousands of people by posing centrally the following questions: how can we transform the present relationship of forces? Where should we concentrate our efforts in order to make the enemy retreat?

Q: The post-1968 generation was educated in political organizations that were very homogeneous on the ideological level, where the work of reappropriation of knowledge, theoretical training and development was very important, often to the detriment of the ability to conduct politics within broader frameworks. Having said that, how do you pose the problem of the education of new cadres, who do not develop only through the practice of the movements, but who also acquire tools for analysis and a serious theoretical training?

A: The theoretical debate and the historical knowledge of our generation are an immense asset. Nothing would have been possible without this critical examination of the history of the workers' movement, without this effort to create a living Marxism. I believe that a party of the socialist Left must take up these reflections again and look further into them. We are perhaps fortunate to be continuing this effort within the framework of a capitalism and a working class which have been transformed, while using Marxism for what it is, that is, as a working tool. Our last congress decided to create a centre of education which addresses itself especially to social activists. Its first courses are starting now and

deal with the history of the revolutions of the last century - October, the Spanish Civil War, China, Cuba, Vietnam, May '68, the Portuguese Revolution - in order to think about the strategic questions which they raised. We are also starting to publish a theoretical review.



We are also making an effort to develop new means of communication, since the role played by newspapers, some decades ago, is being supplanted today by interactive means. Thus, our Internet site has developed in a spectacular way, with thousands of visits every day. We publish on it a weekly dossier on political, historical and other questions, which is aimed at a broad audience. We diffuse radio programmes by streaming. Finally, we want to develop audio-visual production – from clips to documentaries – which can be used as a basis for education and discussion, but also in the campaigns of the Bloc. In September, we will hold a study weekend, “Socialism 2007”, to discuss strategy and history, trade-union and ecological struggles, but also cultural questions. **R**

Interview conducted by Jean Batou of the Swiss organisation Solidarité.

Francisco Louçã is an economist and a Left Bloc member of the Portuguese parliament. He was the candidate of the Left Bloc in the presidential election of January 2005 (where he won 5.3% of the votes).

REVIVING OUR MOVEMENT

Workers for Union Renewal

For over a generation now workers everywhere have been under attack. While courageous struggles have of course occurred, they have been sporadic, isolated and not matched what we are up against. And so, while corporations have gotten more aggressive and confident, unions have become more cautious and defensive. Unless unions take on the challenge of renewal the inequality, uncertainty, and wasted potential of working class lives will only get worse.

Union renewal is based on three principles that separate us from those who control our labour and determine the nature of our communities:

1. A distinct vision

The economic and political elites present their interests as the national interest. There is, they try to convince us, no alternative. Without a vision independent of that which they present as ‘natural’, we inevitably come up against a dead-end, arguing on their turf and being trapped within their logic. At best, we make modest gains that prove temporary. Building for real change means asserting that if the status quo can’t provide the security, environmentally sustainable access to goods and services, genuine democracy, and space for all of us to develop our full potentials as human beings, then it is the status quo ? and not our expectations – that must be changed.

2. Class solidarity over competitiveness

Under capitalism, workers are dependent on their employers for their jobs. The threat of ‘competitiveness’ presents our employers as allies and other worker as the enemy. Yet if there is anything the recent past has taught us, it’s that the employers cannot and/or will not provide us with security. Our strength ? our ability to affect what happens ? depends on building our links with each other. Against competitiveness and the call to sacrifice our conditions and values to profits, we call for solidarity with workers across workplaces, across sectors, and across borders; with the unionized and those without any kind of democratic representation; with those who work at full time jobs and those with precarious jobs; with the employed and unemployed.

3. Democratic organizations

We cannot successfully fight back unless our organizations fully belong to the members. Democracy is not something given

to us by constitutions or leaders. It is something we must learn and develop through direct participation. Union democracy is a goal important in its own right; it is an instrument fundamental to achieving other goals; and at its best it is an example of how other institutions in society might work.

Workers for Union Renewal (WUR) is a network of activists who have gotten together to collectively discuss, debate and strategize over how to move the above principles ahead. We emerged out of informal contacts within the CAW, but our intent is to extend our links, as we consolidate within the CAW, to other unions. As such, we are not a CAW caucus but worker activists whose priority is to build the kind of base across workplaces, unions, and communities that contributes to reviving and renewing the capacity of the working class to effect change ? and which no union leadership can ignore.

Our basic premise is that waiting for ‘someone’ to do it for us guarantees disappointment. Either people like us will take on the question of the renewal of unions (and ultimately the renewal of the labour movement as a whole) or it won’t happen.

Our immediate focus is on:

- Building WUR committees in multiple workplaces;
- Undertaking activities in every workplace where we have a base of support since significant change in our unions begins at the workplace.
- Establishing a newsletter to share information, report on struggles and engage in collective discussion;
- Holding educational forums to develop our analysis and understanding;
- Building a capacity to strategize, mobilize, and intervene in key issues inside and outside unions;
- Developing the arguments and tactics to respond to issues already enveloping us: fighting concessions in working conditions and compensation, responding to ‘free’ trade and the crisis in manufacturing jobs, resisting the erosion of social programs, and coming to grips with the tensions between jobs and the environment.

Labour Policies and the Wage Gap

Marjorie Griffin Cohen

The results of the 2006 census on income were recently published and produced screaming headlines about the enormous wage decline in Canada over the past 25 years. The income gap between rich and poor is widening, immigrant incomes are plummeting and young people entering the labour market are earning less than their parents a generation ago.

In British Columbia, the median real wage dropped 11.3% from 1980, the steepest slide for any province. Statistics Canada officials were at a loss to explain why B.C. had such a huge drop in income, although various analysts said it was a result of a shift away from industrial employment towards service-sector jobs, an increase in new immigrants in the workforce and rising inter-provincial migration.

Something else needs to be considered: Deliberate government changes in labour policy. Soon after the current government was elected in 2001, it proceeded with initiatives to improve “flexibility” in the labour market. The most dramatic event was the mass firing of hospital support staff (8,000 laundry, cleaning and food service workers) who were disproportionately women of colour, older and immigrants.

This was the first time in Canada that a government had completely overturned a properly negotiated collective agreement. “Flexibility” in this case meant reversing all of the equal pay gains that health support workers had won through the collective bargaining process over 20 years. These workers initially made \$17 per hour. Those who remained in the public sector had their wages reduced by 15% and those whose work was privatized worked for as little as \$10 per hour. Too many lost work altogether.

Changes in the Employment Standards Act since 2002 are responsible for the deterioration of working conditions. Employment standards are important because they provide minimum levels for wages and working conditions. The main changes in the act related to decreased enforcement of the law, removal of whole groups of workers from the law’s protection, and specific regulatory changes affecting all workers.

Enforcement was affected by budget cuts to the Employment Standards Branch that resulted in a one-third reduction in staff, a cut in branch offices throughout the province from 17 to nine, and the elimination of routine workplace inspections. But most significant was the shift from having a complaint dealt with by a person to the introduction of a “self-help kit.” The result was stunning: Complaints dropped 46% the first year and 61% over the follow-

ing three years. This is not because employers began behaving better, but because it is so much harder for workers to file complaints.

Whole groups of workers have been excluded altogether from most of the protections of employment standards. This includes all workers in trade unions, or about 34% of all workers in the province. Other workers excluded from major protections are long-haul truck drivers, oil and gas field workers, foster parents and farm workers.



Most seriously affected by the changes in standards are young workers and immigrants. B.C. was the first jurisdiction in the industrialized world to deregulate child labour and allow children as young as 12 to be employed for up to four hours on a school day to a maximum of 20 hours a week, and during non-school periods for up to 35 hours a week. There are no longer prohibitions on work that is inappropriate for children (such as using power tools and selling door-to-door). B.C. also pioneered the “first job” minimum wage of \$6 an hour for the first 500 hours of work, giving the province the lowest wage for new workers in Canada. But many in this category are immigrant women with considerable work experience who find themselves confined to \$6 an hour and too often do not leave this wage category when the qualifying period is up. The experience of young workers can be dismal as well since many appear to lose their jobs when the 500 hours are over. **R**

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Labour and (Post)Industrial Policy in Toronto

Steven Tufts

Statistics Canada reports that Canada had 70,000 fewer manufacturing jobs in 2007 than the previous year, marking the seventh consecutive annual employment decline in the sector. The crisis in manufacturing in Canada is a bipolar tale. Labour has been greatly diminished in the sector with lost jobs and fewer hours worked, often as a result of higher productivity. For unions, this has led to concessionary bargaining and new agreements or 'frameworks' for organizing non-union firms which threaten solidarity within the labour movement.

Manufacturing capital did not, however, do nearly as poorly last year. There have been shifts in output and profitability away from durable goods in Ontario to the processing of metals and fossil fuels in western Canada for global markets, but overall manufacturing sales continue to increase. Despite changing economic conditions in the US, manufacturing sales reached \$613 billion in 2007 as even auto production stagnates in Ontario. Yet, the auto industry has also restructured through growth in non-union parts production and government subsidization of new non-union assembly transplants and re-tooled union facilities. The auto industry, with the aid of the Canadian Auto Workers, has been successful in securing federal and provincial subsidies such as the 20% subsidization of the \$800 million retooling of Oakville's Ford assembly plant announced in 2004. This occurred only eighteen months after Ford announced a cut of 35,000 jobs, or 10% of its global workforce.

As a result, manufacturing capital, assisted by public subsidies, has been able to enter intensive rounds of 'creative destruction' and dislocate workers while increasing the extraction of surplus value. Industrial unions have often participated in the process of seeking subsidies. It has been noted that one of the benefits Magna will receive from the 'Framework for Fairness Agreement' reached with the CAW in 2007 is the 'partnership' it will now have with the union when it comes time to demand subsidies to facilitate the restructuring of its parts plants.

The contradiction facing subsidy-seeking industrial capital and labour is that the declining power of industrial unions that comes with displaced employment will potentially limit the sector's influence with the state. Today, manufacturing workers account for only 500,000 of Canada's 4 million unionized workers. Further, the majority of workers in non-manufacturing sectors may interpret continued state subsidies as increasingly counter to their individual (e.g., higher taxes) or collective (e.g., decreased funds for social programs) interests.

There are also other forces challenging the traditional manner in which unions deal with deindustrialization. There is, for example, a rescaling of economic development strategies in many advanced capitalist economies which is less focussed on direct federal and regional support and more centred on local subsidies and tax regimes in large post-industrial cities. Nation-states have reoriented neoliberal accumulation strategies to promote the concentration of wealth in metropolitan centres which serve global markets. These policies have fostered inter-regional competition between urban centres.

Such shifts in industrial strategy may, however, create new openings for Canadian labour, especially unions located in large de-industrialized cities such as Toronto. In the late 1980s, manufacturing workers accounted for 20% of the Toronto census metropolitan area's labour force. Today, manufacturing accounts for less than 15% of jobs. This decline threatens industrial unions, but organizations representing workers in growing sectors of the metropolitan economy, such as hospitality, are better positioned to leverage localized development initiatives in order to increase workers' power.



Two such campaigns are a labour lead community struggle for a community benefits agreement with a mega-development in Rexdale and local labour's critique of a new local tax incentive program to revitalize industrial sectors in Toronto. These are both promising campaigns currently supported by Local 75 UNITE-HERE (representing 7,000 hotel workers in the city) and Toronto's central labour council. These campaigns raise the possibility of forming a new progressive urban union agenda for Toronto, if

they can avoid falling into the politics of desperation besetting many industrial unions facing the spectre of job loss.

Taking the High Road to the Community: Real Jobs for Rexdale

In March 2003, a global outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory (SARS) spread to a Toronto from its origin in southern China's Guangdong Province resulting in 44 deaths in the city. The World Health Organization also issued a travel advisory for the city, which devastated its tourism industry and displaced thousands of hospitality workers at the start of the tourism season. In response to the situation, Local 75 UNITE HERE established a Hospitality Workers Resource Centre (HWRC) with government and employer support to assist workers, with employment insurance, job searches and retraining for work within and outside the sector.

Despite the closure of HWRC as the SARS crisis ended, Local 75 continued to explore 'high road partnerships' as a means to reinvent the low wage sector as a high wage productive industry with training opportunities. In the recent 2006 round of collective bargaining, the union advocated for a 'high-road partnership' model with employers to improve the quality of jobs and service delivery in the industry. Local 75 struck a task force under the leadership of Janet Dassinger, a Local 75 staff representative who was instrumental in securing funding for the HWRC. A report was released in late 2006 titled *An Industry at the Crossroads: A High Road Economic Vision for Toronto Hotels*. In the report, a call is

The recent success of Local 75 has improved the working lives of members drawn from the most vulnerable segments of the labour market – recent immigrants and racialized workers in particular. The next step for the union was to take the 'high road vision' beyond its members to the communities in which they live. Rexdale, in northwest Toronto, is one such neighbourhood struggling with underemployment and poverty. It is also next to the Woodbine Racetrack, the city's horse racing and slots facility owned by a private non-profit firm, Woodbine Entertainment Group, is located. The racetrack, first established in the 1870s, is on the 266 hectare Woodbine lands, the largest track of undeveloped land in Toronto (purchased sometime ago by a group of local 'horsemen'). The land is also considered to be part of an 'employment district' designated by the City of Toronto and is to be protected from residential and commercial retail development given the scarcity of industrial land in the city.

In 2005, the Cordish Company, based in Baltimore, announced a \$310-million 'urban revitalization' project in Rexdale based on an expansion on the existing racetrack facilities owned by their development partner, the Woodbine Entertainment Group. The initial investment was reported by Cordish to generate 2,300 permanent jobs and \$150 million in taxes per year for the first decade. This has been bumped up: the employment generated is now claimed to be 6,000 jobs in retail and entertainment and another 3,000 linked to a second phase of commercial office and residential development and the private investment to be close to \$1 billion. The project has been titled "Woodbine Live" and mimics other projects of Cordish such as the "Power Plant Live" urban revitalization project in Baltimore's inner harbour, which opened in 2000. These investments are almost always based upon significant tax incentives from the local state.



made to develop a 'high road' labour-management partnership and long-term labour force development strategy for Toronto's hospitality sector. In the collective agreements negotiated with large hotels in 2006, gains were made toward this vision. Specifically, an Equal Opportunity Training Fund was negotiated with several large hotels to provide resources for worker training as envisioned with the HWRC experiment.

Given the sector and the fact that many of Local 75's members live in Rexdale, the union launched a community campaign in 2006 to intervene in the development process and secure a community benefits agreement (CBA) with Cordish. The Community Organizing for Responsible Development (the acronym 'C.O.R.D.' is a direct affront to Cordish) has organized numerous community meetings in order to educate the community about the sometimes brutal impacts of such developments on communities, such as increases in housing prices, abandonment and decay of the tax base. The community campaign, lead by Local 75, is insisting that the city negotiate a CBA with Cordish which would include guarantees of economic, social and environmental benefits (see table). The strategy is largely drawn from the experiences of US cities, where communities have entered such agreements with developers. Poor communities in LA, Chicago and other large centres have been mobilizing with union support to fight parasitic revitalization projects. The strategies have been advocated by *Good Jobs First*, a Washington based national policy and resource centre founded by Greg LeRoy in 1998 which has influenced Local 75's strategy. The centre promotes "promoting corporate and government accountability →

in economic development and smart growth for working families” (www.goodjobsfirst.org).

The community has responded with large turnouts to C.O.R.D. events and support for the Real Jobs for Rexdale campaign, which emphasized local hiring targets and training funds. Approximately 500 community members attended the first major meeting held in a Rexdale high school auditorium. Cordish initially expressed a willingness to talk about demands for 30% local hiring, but in interviews with union activists it appears the company has ‘walked away’ from any such concessions. There is also less willingness to talk about what is perhaps a fundamental principle of C.O.R.D.: namely that no public financing be used to attract the investment. The Cordish Company has a business model of attaining public support for its projects from local governments desperate to revitalize depressed neighbourhoods. It is difficult to see if the project will ever be completed without public investment. The company is seeking up to \$76 million in subsidies in the form of development charge and building permit waivers and proposed tax incentives. Fortunately for the company, the City of Toronto is beginning to experiment to such financing schemes.

Tax Incremental Equivalent Grants (TIEGs) and Employment Lands

It is perhaps coincidental that Woodbine Live! has emerged at a time when new tax incentive programs are now permissible under the City of the Toronto Act (formally known as *The Stronger City of Toronto for a Stronger Ontario Act*) passed by the provincial legislature in 2006. The first of these proposed programs is the Tax Incremental Equivalent Grants (TIEGs). TIEGs give firms multi-year tax holidays if an investment falls in a targeted region or sector. In the case of Toronto, these are being aimed at the designated employment districts as a reindustrialization strategy. Any qualified additional or new investment in a district and/or specified sector would receive a 100% municipal tax holiday in the first year and the taxes would be ‘rehabilitated’ at 10% a year for the next ten years (after which 100% of taxes would be paid). There are of course fundamental problems with such schemes as they largely involve local states picking winners (neighbourhoods and/or industries) to receive the tax break. There are also risks associated with firms exiting the local market after a short period and collecting the highest subsidies at the front end of the incentive. Most fundamental are the rounds of inter and intra regional competition set off as other cities establish their own programs with even lower tax rates.

In 2007, Toronto City Council began seriously exploring such a program following the release of a staff report on TIEGs. Designated employment lands may be proposed as qualifying regions. But the sectors presently proposed to be eligible include: screen based industries such as film and television; aerospace, pharmaceuticals, and/or electronic equipment manufacturing; food and beverage manufacturing; environmental production and research; IT and new media; life science industries and research; and tourism (which would likely make the Woodbine

Live! investment eligible). The list echoes those of ‘new economy’ boosters.

In discussions with labour activists currently organizing to influence the TIEGs program, it appears that there is less concern about the program itself (and the pathway it presents toward unbridled interregional competition) and more debate over what can be secured for workers. There was some initial discussion over lobbying to expand the qualifying criteria to include things such as mandatory neutrality agreements with unions for firms benefitting from TIEGs. It appears that the present strategy by local labour leaders has shifted toward having some input into the above list of sectoral ‘winners’. For example, opposition has been voiced emphasizing the retail, non-tourism nature of projects such as Woodbine Live! so that they are ruled ineligible for the TIEGs in favour of new economy industrial sectors. There is also a call by local labour council leadership to have ‘green industry’ as primary beneficiaries of TIEGs.

TIEGs and High Road Development: Co-opted Community Unionism?

Organized labour has been clear and consistent in its position that this project should receive no public subsidy. Despite the position of C.O.R.D. and labour, it was suddenly announced in early July that the Woodbine Entertainment Group and Cordish had the support of the Mayor’s office and economic development staff for tax incremental equivalent and development grants worth almost \$120 million over a 20-year period. As a ‘transformative’ project, WoodbineLive! is eligible for a 90% tax deferral for the first five years and 80% for the next five. Interestingly, the proposal presented to the Economic Development Committee by City of Toronto staff also includes a local hiring plan aimed at three ‘Priority Neighbourhoods’ (Jane-Finch, Jamestown and Weston-Mt-Dennis) and local training funded by multiple levels of government.

Struggling with mega redevelopment projects and new tax incentives do present labour with strategic opportunities to leverage power and unions will continue to pressure local development initiatives and attempt to seize openings as accumulation strategies are reconfigured through metropolitan centres. But campaigns can easily be co-opted by local governments who symbolically respond only to a few select demands. Unions may also be following the same pattern of industrial unions, which have yielded limited success.

First, the community capacity building in Rexdale with C.O.R.D. has been significant, but remains a largely ‘top-down’ initiative largely run and supported by Local 75 organizers. While the demands of C.O.R.D. from WoodbineLive! are significant, they are still well within the confines of capitalist development as the unions and community groups involved are merely seeking a place at the table to manage creative destruction as Toronto shifts further toward post-industrialism. Local 75 and the community group might very well wish that Cordish not invest in the community if

key demands are not met, but there is no strong position taken against the very nature of the development (i.e., commercial) itself and the dangers of expanding activities such as gambling in the Rexdale community. When local government strategically chooses to address a few demands, there is little room for community unions to manoeuvre as any outright rejection of the deal appears as an unwillingness to be reasonable.

Second, it is clear that local labour does wish to protect traditional blue-collar jobs by fighting for employment districts and stemming the flow of manufacturing jobs, which have a higher union density than retail, to the exurbs. But lobbying to influence the TIEGs program and the sectors which it would support is merely engagement in the process of ‘picking winners’ for future rounds of capitalist investment. In many ways, this is no different from the CAW and other unions lobbying with industry for auto sector support, even if the type of subsidies and the list of ‘winners’ is changed. Again, there has yet to be a public outcry against the ideological and economic foundations of the TIEGs program itself, which could simply lead to a round of intensive interregional competition for investment.

Lastly, as accumulation strategies are rescaled to the local level, unions seizing new opportunities may prematurely be abandoning the national and provincial state as important players in local economic development processes. For example, demands by C.O.R.D. for community benefits may also be letting the state ‘off the hook’ as mixed income housing and space for health care are to be delivered by a hybrid of local capital and municipalities. It is here where the limits of such strategies begin to surface. Local 75 is rightly portrayed as one of the most innovative unions in Toronto (relative to a largely inactive labour movement). Organized labour’s efforts may very well provide a few extra benefits for some Rexdale workers in de-industrialized employment districts. Over the longer term, however, such progressive efforts may also assist capital in diminishing the role of the state and ushering in new rounds of interregional competition. Until labour begins to attack the very foundations of capitalist accumulation and inequality, it flirts with inevitable participation in broader processes of neoliberalism. **R**

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C.O.R.D. demands for Community Benefits Agreement with “Woodbine Live!”

Economic benefits:

- Reduced poverty by creating jobs that pay a living wage, benefits, and where workers rights are protected (e.g., employer neutrality in union organizing campaigns)
- Local hiring targets of 30% with targets for socially excluded groups such as youth, immigrants and newcomers and women
- \$1 million to fund high quality training, including apprenticeship, to ensure job readiness and transferable skills
- A commitment to equity targets in the overall hiring process

Social benefits:

- Access to affordable, accessible, high quality child care
- Recreational and social amenities for families, youth, and seniors that are culturally appropriate, affordable and easily accessible
- Mixed income housing
- Health care facilities

Environmental benefits:

- Access to safe, affordable public transit
- Meeting LEED or other environmental standards for buildings
- Green space and air quality monitoring

Source: C.O.R.D.’s proposed value/goal statement (2007) and informant interviews

Of Gods and Markets

A Lament for Oshawa Workers

Jean-Pierre Daubois

In the wake of General Motor's shocking announcement of its plan to close the Oshawa truck plant just two weeks after the end of bargaining, CAW Local 222 organized a blockade of the corporation's Canadian headquarters. For 12 days the union local challenged the American-based auto giant to rescind its decision to close its award-winning truck plant. In bargaining, GM promised to continue production at the plant at least until 2011 in exchange for significant concessions from the union. The blockade is down and a new agreement has been signed that provides a series of buyout packages and promises new investment in the car plant, but accepts the impending truck plant closing and leaves the concessions intact.

The following comment on the situation in Ottawa is from long-time Quebec autoworker/activist, Jean-Pierre Daubois, who worked in the now-closed GM Plant in Ste. Therese, Quebec. Daubois remains active in the Quebec trade union movement and the left.

Many ancient civilizations used animal and/or human sacrifice as a way to appease the gods and prevent their wrath (a wrath that could result in droughts, hurricanes, diseases etc) or to make the sun rise the next morning. Modern civilization regards these practices as barbaric. They were, but are we much different?

In today's modern society, instead of having avenging gods punish entire communities by unleashing natural elements, we have different kind of gods, as mysterious, unapproachable, vindictive, cruel and unpredictable as any ancient gods. Today's all-powerful gods are called: *free market, globalization, competition, profit*. In one word: capitalism. These gods have many ways to show their wrath: closing, de-localization, downsizing, restructuring, economic boycott of non-obedient countries, debt crisis, market crash...

Ritually and routinely the market wants its *pound of flesh*, as they say in the bible, to appease the wrath of the investors, bankers and other capitalists. Hundreds of workers in Oshawa, if not thousands, are to be laid off so that the faceless god-corporation can pursue the practice of its religion: amass profits.

You're the best, unfortunately...

For decades, part of the "promises" of capitalism was that if you worked hard you could have a share of the pie. It was true for a while for very few countries, mostly in Western Europe, North America and Japan. Now the triumphant god-market has other opportunities through a string of "third world" countries that have joined the competition to offer the lowest cost and most obedient work force possible to the altar of profit.

Workers in the "developed world" are facing the above mentioned many wraths of god-capitalism. From *demanding more*, they are moving into conceding past gains, trying to hold the tide of the hurricane with sand bags. Unions now negotiate wage and benefit reductions, a necessary sacrifice demanded by god corporation.

Many General Motors plants have been closed and more downsizing is on the way. The affected workers are outraged "*how can they do that to us... we are so good, so dedicated, so profitable.*" Does it matter that the sacrificed workers were, only a day before, described as the most profitable? No, there is always a bigger profit to be squeeze out of an un-organized worker or, even better, from a worker suffering under a dictatorship.

So the Oshawa workers are stunned by the announcement of the closure of the truck plant. They should not be. Before them the Boisbriand workers were sacrificed on the altar of competition and globalization, before them, a majority of St-Catharine's workers were sacrificed - their sacrifice was supposed to "secure the jobs" of a remaining few - before them Scarborough workers. The list goes on... Only recently, Windsor workers were axed in a sacrifice ritual. They too were "competitive", "productive" and "low cost." It does not matter; a pound of flesh is needed to secure the growth and the profits of the god-corporation.

Every economic sector is feeling the wrath of the gods. Who can turn the hurricane? Who can stop the market? Workers have to concede wages, benefits, pensions and health care. It won't stop. God-capitalism will not rest; its thirst for profits is insatiable.

For the few spared, a strange mix of feelings: **relief**, to have avoided the axe one more time; **fear**, knowing that god-market has not throw away his axe, it is just a matter of time before more flesh is needed; **guilt**, as the survivor thinking of those sacrificed; **despair**, so loved by capitalism, as it keeps workers hopeless and hopelessness brings obedience.

God is everywhere, he is omniscient ...

God-market has to be everywhere, in every sphere of human activity and needs. In the past, governments sinned by nationalizing natural resources, mines, electricity or other industries and by establishing public services. They have now to repent, to re-



deem themselves and give it back on the altar of free market. The very concept of “public service” is in itself: antithesis to the theology of the free market. Every public service is by definition a loss of profit for a corporation.

No, there will not be a modernization of god’s work. A more civilized capitalist, willing to treat workers with dignity, will quickly be put out of business by capitalists more than willing to use the full specter of opportunities offered by globalization in the quest for market share and profits. Many governments have been overthrown because god-capitalism feared them. Even if the governments weren’t socialist, heresies like a quest for independence were sufficient to attire the wrath of god-capitalism: Mossadegh, in Iran, Arbenz in Guatemala, Goulart in Brasil, Allende in Chile, the list is endless

But the “beauty” of this religion is that it can flourish in almost all political colors, from the right to the center, the center-left, to much of the so-called left. Having so many colors of the same religion sure brings the illusion of democracy to the masses, there are so many ways to bend to the god-market rule as politicians are proving everyday...

From capitalist theology... to another world is possible

We shall all realize that humankind will not survive under capitalism because the planet will not survive its logic of profit. The roots of every war can be traced back to the very “moral values” of capitalism: *greed, thirst for domination, profits*. These morals govern the destruction of the environment and the acceleration of many other social and labor miseries.

As Galileo had to abstain, by fear of the inquisition, to say that earth is round and revolves around the sun, we are not supposed to proclaim that a new world shall replace capitalism. But if we want to preserve the environment, stop the many wars and start to produce for the real needs of the vast majority, we shall become atheists and stop believing in the god-market. Its whims, wraths and greediness have surely made capitalism dynamic, but the dynamic is one of destruction that is killing the planet and killing us. **R**

Class, Labour and Anti-Poverty Struggles

Herman Rosenfeld

It is less than a year since the Ontario provincial election where poverty issues were raised but never really addressed. The governing Liberal Party, after doing all but nothing to reverse the cuts of the Harris/Eves era, got a new majority. The labour movement was divided during the election in its support for the dominant parties and also in its approach to poverty issues. But for the most part the labour movement remains divorced from the struggles of poor people. The union movement has to do a major re-think of its approach to the unorganized and poor. The persistence of poverty under neoliberalism is important to understanding the relationship between different components of the working class today.

The working class is divided in many ways: by occupation, by sector, by race and gender, and so on. The division between core and poor workers is another. The latter can be seen to include: employed workers fighting for a living wage; workers who, for quite a variety of reasons, are dependent upon state payments collectively known as ‘welfare’; homeless and poorly housed people who need a decent and affordable place to live; and workers who are living and sometimes working here without officially-recognized citizenship or immigrant status in the eyes of the Canadian state. These are all part of the many layers of the labour reserves that form a critical part of the working class for the operations of capitalist labour markets. They underpin the position of workers who have been more successful in selling labour-power to an employer for a wage, and who have secure, better-paying jobs, often as members of the trade union movement.

Indeed, in this period of neoliberalism, a significant and growing sector of the working class have been pushed into poverty: people who work in huge swaths of the low-paid service sector; people in contingent work positions who can’t find full time jobs; workers whose jobs that have been outsourced to subcontractors; and workers who are forced to rely on casual work or who have had to migrate from their home country to look for work. Many of these workers try to get by in the expanding informal and grey economies.

There are also those who are dependent upon support because of limits on their ability to work, and whose support payments have been cut by neoliberal attacks on welfare rates. These include: single parents; people living with disabilities, illness, and life-challenging crises; many students trying to get an education or re-training; and victims of forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. As social services have been cut, these workers face huge problems in housing, getting treatment, providing adequate support for children and much else.

The reality of living in the neoliberal era is that much of the working class is no longer in secure, well-paid unionized jobs.

Even many unionized jobs are low-paying and insecure today. The working class is segmented and separated, as capital increasingly drives towards hyper-competitiveness and outsources as much as possible to areas where low wages prevail.

Increasingly, as workers we live in a ‘pyramid economy’, where core employers look to breakdown the production of goods and services and the division of labour itself into separate components and move them into lower tiers. There, workers are paid less, have less security, and the entire enterprise has a tenuous relationship with its larger and more secure customer. Thus, a new layer of flexible, low-paid and poor working class is created. This is not to mention the way developed capitalist societies like Canada are supposed to specialize in different service areas, although it is quite clear that the ‘knowledge economy’ is just as susceptible to low wages and market insecurity as any other sector.

These divisions, between highly paid workers in some sectors and other sectors of the neoliberal economy, are part of what has divided the working class under neoliberalism. Those in good paying jobs, whether in the manufacturing or public sectors, have often moved to increasingly defensive positions to try to protect those jobs. Those in the growing insecure sectors of employment under neoliberalism have found it difficult to organize and combat the pressures on wages and employment security. And the struggles of those dependent upon public support to attain their livelihoods have become increasingly isolated from these other sectors and workers. Neoliberalism has accentuated these divisions. Yet, these are all part of the working class dependent upon the ability to sell – or not – labour to small employers, big capital or the capitalist state (in all cases working under the management of others) for a wage.

Receiving social assistance payments and or wages from an employer as a member of a strong union are fundamentally different situations. They capture the different challenges that organized workers and poor workers face. Social assistance recipients are much more dependent; and live with a stigma that allows the state to keep payments at an unliveable level. From the stance of many unionized working people, welfare is seen to be coming off of ‘our taxes’. Capitalist ideology helps generate this notion of separating the so-called ‘deserving’ from the ‘non-deserving’ poor. This helps maintain the discipline of welfare – low benefit rates, being forced to work for lowest wages, extensive supervision – and also keeps pressures on working class living standards.

Limits of Union Organization

No longer can this divide between the better-off sections of the working class, some of whom are successfully defended and

organized by strong trade unions, and the marginalized continue. It is increasingly difficult for a segment of the working class to rely on its own capacities to collectively organize and fight-back in isolation from increasing numbers of workers who are marginalized. Bridging this divide is one of the principal strategic goals for socialists active either in unions or organizations of the poor.

Poor people have been organized in every major city in Canada, the US and elsewhere in different ways. There are equivalents of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) and the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC) in many cities. There is a beginning of a large movement of workers' centres across North America. The poor do self organize and provide services and supports of different kinds. Those organizations are quite often political and they use direct-action and collective and participatory ways of doing things. They are typically short of resources, however, and often have difficult relations with any particular constituency in a way that can supply the funds for major political struggles and campaigns.

Labour unions are different. They mostly spend their resources on defending their members in workplaces, in the political arena and through collective bargaining. They remain dependent in many ways on the success of their employers and this breeds a certain kind of attitude. Many are strongest amongst white, better-off

workers. Some are now increasingly organizing amongst different segments of the working class. Union members now are just as likely to be female as male and increasingly represent the diversity of the working class. UNITE-HERE and many locals of CUPE, for example, particularly in the major cities of Canada, have become transformed by the racial and ethnic diversity of the members.

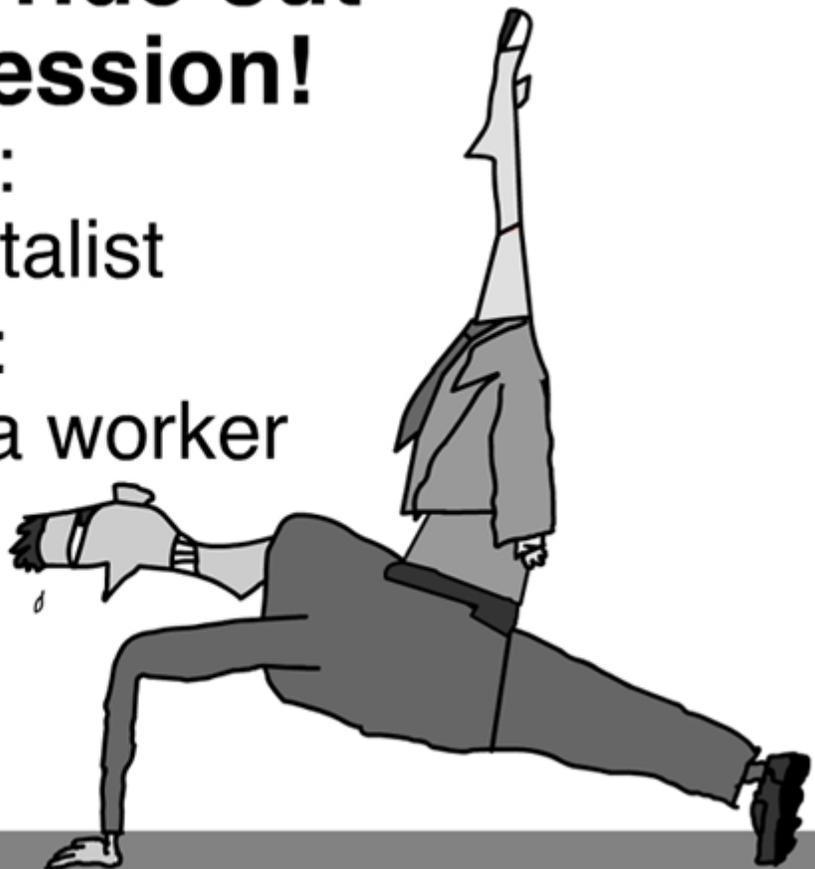
The union movement often provides some support to organizations of the poor and anti-poverty campaigns. Unions regularly give resources to poor peoples' movements, as seen in the support provided for many workers' centres. Ontario labour councils have been supporting demands for further increases in the minimum wage; Employment Standards Act improvements; recognition of immigrant qualifications; housing/childcare/education; reducing the impediments to the right to unionize through card-checks; and improved social benefits. There are some unions that are organizing poor workers; some are giving financial support to organizations like OCAP and the TRDC and other campaigns; and others provide organizers to help mobilize for the anti-poverty campaigns.

But the relationship between unions and the organizations of the poor is often tense. Unions implicitly say: "We have the resources, and you must respect our needs and priorities if you want access to them." There is often a tendency for unions →

How to ride out the recession!

Step one:
be a capitalist

Step two:
don't be a worker



to separate calls for minimum wage increases from demands to increase social benefits for welfare recipients. “We don’t want to ‘turn-off’ our more conservative members.” There are major disagreements on tactics, as unions often focus on bargaining solutions, while there is little that the poor can bargain for and are drawn to take direct actions to get needs met and political demonstrations directed at the government of the day.

Unions – as progressive and important they are as the leading organizations of the working class – have major limitations in building linkages with marginalized workers:

- They are geared mainly towards their own members and have no necessary ties to the rest of the working class.
- The only way to join a union in Canada today is to be organized in a workplace, with a range of legal restrictions, leaving many workers unorganized.
- Unions are not necessarily oriented to fighting for the interests of workers (even their members) outside of the workplace.
- Unions often see non-status immigrants as mainly a threat to wages and work.
- Unions have a dependence upon the competitive success of employers, and this can easily skew their approach to politics.
- Unions can often become elected autocracies and become fearful of autonomous centres of power in their organization.
- Unions often fall into seeking just simple reforms and don’t organize for fundamental change – the poor will always be with us.

Unions and Organizing the Poor

In organizing workers as a class, however, unions need to be more than allies of the poor and unorganized. They need to integrate poor people into the way that they do things. This involves forming a new social movement-type of unionism, some of it being practised in other parts of the world.

One of these ideas is to open-up union membership to the unemployed, non-status immigrants and others in the informal sector. The CTA union central in Argentina practises this kind of unionism. Unemployed workers, sex trade workers and all kinds of workers are fully-fledged members there. When poor people are actually members – and not just the object of charity – the kinds of things unions can organize around can be exponentially changed. Life outside as well as inside the workplace becomes a key focus – so-called community unionism becomes a real component of the union’s work, not just rhetoric.

There are many other ideas that can develop when unions see themselves as building a class, and the poor as part of the movement.

- Collective and co-operative state-funded housing solutions might be developed. Instead of simply making things easier for workers to buy private housing, the ideal of collective and non-profit forms of living can flourish.
- The interests of people dependent on social supports can be integrated with people in the private marketplace and public sector.
- Precarious workers can be organized as part of the movement, contributing to a change in the economic model that makes this kind of labour form flourish.
- People in the informal sector subject to police harassment can be defended by unions.
- Experiments with non-majority union organizing, which would organize an independent and militant union from within, in workplaces where the majority of workers are not yet ready to unionize.
- An alternate economic vision of a collective, publicly owned and regulated, green and democratically planned economy that also builds new spaces for working with the poor and unorganized. Such a strategy requires the assessment of community needs and developing new organizational means to integrate and build the capacities of the poor.

Unions and Class

Such a shift in the strategy of unions means that both unions and current members need to change their outlook. Union education programs would have to reflect this as well. We need to organize and appeal to the working class as a class. This is too often dissolved into general notion of all Canadians as ‘middle class’, or the even more nebulous ‘ordinary Canadians’ used in the past in NDP organizing. Class must be seen through the prisms of gender and race, not as the isolated forms of political and social identity that too often serves as the way of organizing political action in Canada and as the intellectual fashion of understanding multiculturalism in Canada. This is to redefine the relationship between labour and community and to create new kinds of political instruments that organize in new ways with new structures and discourses.

These kinds of changes are not going to happen overnight. But in order to challenge neoliberalism, and ultimately capitalism, we have to transform our unions with this kind of agenda in mind. It is one in which poor workers are a central strategic component of how unions organize and how we understand workers and class. **R**

Herman Rosenfeld is a union activist in Toronto.

Mapping Regional Tensions in Correa's Ecuador and Evo's Bolivia

Susan Spronk

Bolivia and Ecuador share much more in common than amazing biodiversity and stunning geography. Both countries are home to powerful indigenous movements that have been characterized as amongst the most powerful on the continent. After long periods of political instability, they have both recently elected left-of-centre presidents who have promised to end “the long night of neoliberalism.” Rafael Correa, Ecuador's eighth president within ten years, was elected in November 2007; Evo Morales, Bolivia's sixth president within eight years, was elected in December 2005. Both finished their electoral races with decisive popular mandates. Despite these similarities, every political transition is the product of particular historical circumstances.

Over the past two years, the Bolivian government has barely kept afloat in a churning sea of strikes and blockades. On May 4th, the government was subjected to a sovereignty referendum organized by the elite in the eastern department of Santa Cruz that threatens to pull the country apart. In contrast, after a year and a half in government, Ecuador is experiencing a period of relative calm. There have been relatively few social mobilizations and the government appears to be advancing its reformist agenda with comparatively less opposition.

To begin to explain why Bolivia is on the brink of divorce while Correa enjoys a political honeymoon, this article compares the politics of the transitions underway along four axes: the geography of natural resource struggles; the politics of representation; the relationship between political parties and social movements; and the design of the constituent assemblies. In some crucial respects, Evo and the Movement towards Socialism (MAS) face more difficult set of historical circumstances than Correa and his government in their bids to achieve progressive reform. Given the “top down” character of the political transition underway in Ecuador, however, the prospects for radical transformation under Correa remain limited.

Natural Resource Geographies: Who “Owns” the Oil?

Bolivia and Ecuador are both economies deeply dependent on primary resource extraction that are characterized by strong regional divides. While typically thought of as “Andean,” they are both in fact very geographically diverse. About half of Bolivia's territory, for example, lies in Amazon to the north and in the lowlands of the east, while a little less than half of Ecuador's territory lies in the Amazon and on the coast. In both countries, the capital cities are located in the Andes due to historical rea-

sons. Over the past decades, though, economic power has slowly shifted elsewhere. Despite these similarities, social conflicts over the exploitation of oil and gas, which lie at the heart of contemporary political struggles, have fuelled greater regional tensions in Bolivia than in Ecuador due to the countries' distinct physical, economic and political geographies.

Bolivia became a nation in 1825 when silver and tin mines, located in the mountainous regions of the west, provided the state with the bulk of its foreign exchange. La Paz, which also lies in the far western part of the country, was chosen as the seat of government given its location as a key stop on the trading routes. With the slow collapse of the mining economy since the mid-twentieth century, however, economic power has slowly shifted east. Today, the area known as the “*media luna*” for its half moon shape is home to the most powerful elements of Bolivia's capitalist class – agro-exporters and gas magnates. Relatively untouched by the agrarian reform that followed the national-popular revolution of 1952, land in this region remains highly concentrated in a few hands. To this day, labour relations in parts of the countryside are “semi-feudal.”

Perhaps most importantly, oil and gas deposits, first discovered in mid-century but developed more intensely in the 1990s, lie exclusively in the eastern and southern regions of the country (80% of the natural gas extracted in Bolivia lies in the south-eastern province of Tarija). Today, oil is of minor importance but Bolivia is home to the second-largest proven natural gas deposits in South America (after Venezuela). Importantly, the major growing market for natural gas lies outside Bolivia to the south and east. Most of the natural gas that is extracted in Bolivia is exported south and east to neighbouring Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, which depend on this resource to feed their industries. Gas magnates and governors of the eastern provinces therefore have little need to negotiate with politicians in the west regarding the development and export of gas. The notion that the gas “belongs” to the peoples of the eastern region – and not the Andean social movements concentrated in the west who have led the struggles to return the resource to public hands – lends political weight to elite threats to separate.

In Ecuador, the political division in the country also runs along geographic lines between the coast and the sierra. In the colonial division of labor, the sierra city of Quito served as the primary manufacturer of textile goods that made their way down to the mining centers of Peru and Bolivia. Given its weight in the economy, Quito was therefore chosen as the seat of government when the nation gained its independence from Spain in 1822. →

With the cocoa and banana booms of the 19th and 20th centuries, however, the coastal city of Guayaquil (which lies south of Quito) has gained economic importance, eventually overtaking its rival in terms of contribution to GDP. Today, Guayaquil is the country's largest port, the commercial centre and home to agro-export businesses. The Guayaquileño elite considers itself to be the real centre of power in the country.

In contrast to Bolivia, oil in Ecuador has contributed towards nation-building largely due to the country's geography and the timing of its discovery. The deposits lie in the Amazonian frontier, to the east of both the coast and the sierra. The first "oil boom" in Ecuador occurred in the 1970s during a period of progressive military rule when the oil company, PetroEcuador, was owned by the state. While there are multinationals operating in exploration and exploitation, PetroEcuador was never privatized like its Bolivian equivalent. Importantly, Ecuador has access to the sea, which has made it a major supplier of oil to global markets. Ecuador currently ranks as the 9th exporter of crude oil to the USA.

The majority of the oil that is exported abroad is shipped from the Amazon via an oil duct that passes north of Quito to the northern port of Esmeraldas. The Amazonian indigenous populations who are affected by oil exploration and production are well-organized, but relatively small compared to the indigenous groups in the Andes. Ecuador is a typical oil state in which the benefits of oil exploitation in the past decades have accrued mostly to a small elite. Given the country's geography, however, it is difficult for any one regional elite to make particularistic claims over the natural resource, as in Bolivia.

Kollas, Cambas & Mestizos: Racism and the Politics of Representation

These distinct economic geographies have also played out in the racial politics in both countries. Both Bolivia and Ecuador are deeply divided, racist societies. In Ecuador, for example, one of my university colleagues was forbidden as a child from spending time with his Kichwa-speaking grandmother because his parents feared that he would pick up a "lilt" that might impair his ability of class ascension. In Bolivia, indigenous people were forbidden from stepping in the central plaza of La Paz until the 1952 Revolution. Centuries of racism and exclusion suffered by indigenous peoples have been resisted by powerful social movements in both countries, which have experienced an up-

surge in recent decades. The elections of Correa and Evo are important symbolically since both presidents are from humble origins and speak at least one indigenous language. Only Evo, however, claims indigenous identity.

As is well-known, Evo Morales' election is of world-historic importance. He is the first bona fide indigenous president in Latin America with deep roots in the indigenous movement. Evo grew up in destitute poverty, born to an Aymara family in the Andean highlands of Bolivia. With a low level of formal education, Evo cut his political teeth as a union leader in the Chapare, a semi-tropical area in the central valley where many displaced miners (re-settled following structural adjustment in the 1980s) grow coca. Persecuted by the US's "War against Drugs," the coccaleros developed strong unions built upon a mix of traditions from trade union and indigenous organizations to resist U.S. imperialism.



"The opposition's claims for 'autonomy' and 'democracy' are actually thinly-veiled claims for separation by wealthier, whiter Bolivians"

Evo's political party, the Movement towards Socialism (MAS), emerged in the late 1990s when the coccaleros decided that they needed a "political instrument" in order to defend their right to livelihood against the US-sponsored eradication program. As journalist and investigator Pablo Stefanoni has highlighted, given the indigenous-campesino-trade union mix, the ideological orientation of the MAS tends to be more "national-populist" than "indigenous" per se, but as the party has expanded its social base, it has adapted powerful indigenous symbols such as the coca leaf and the multi-coloured wiphala flag in order to broaden its appeal to the majority indigenous population.

Despite the MAS's "national-populist" origins, the *media luna* has spun a lot of political traction on the idea that Evo is an *indigenista* (a supporter of indigenous concepts of development and community). The opposition's claims for "autonomy" and "democracy" are actually thinly-veiled claims for separation by wealthier, whiter Bolivians in the eastern part of the country, which has a higher concentration of European migrants than the Andean highlands to the west. Given the strong west-east migration in the past few decades, these lighter-skinned elites tend to base their claims for separation on territorial (rather than ethnic) markers that separate the "Cambas" (the eastern lowlanders) from the "Kollas" (the highlanders).

Nonetheless, these eastern elites concerned about the legitimacy of Morales' authority occasionally slip up and express

themselves in overtly racist statements. In a recent speech the mayor of Santa Cruz, for example, declared that: “Soon you’ll have to wear feathers if you want to get any respect in this country.” Such racist sentiments are backed with brute force. Since the late 1990s, the elites have been arming thousands of young people in the Union Juvenil Cruceña (UJC), a fascist gang which focuses its attacks on indigenous people during protests. The presence of the UJC, amongst other organizations, has created a tense political climate since the MAS’s electoral victory, particularly in the department of Santa Cruz.

By contrast to the polarizing effect that Evo’s election has had in Bolivia, Correa is considered to be a centralizing force in Ecuadorian politics. For the paler-skinned Ecuadorian elite, Correa is a much more palatable character. Like Evo, he refuses to wear a tie, but otherwise he looks and talks like them. A mestizo (mixed race, neither Indian nor Spanish) from a middle-class family, Correa was born in Guayaquil but is also popular in rival Quito because of his centre-left political orientation. A devout Catholic, he spent one year on a mission in a rural community in Zumbagua, one of the poorest indigenous areas in the central Andean province of Cotopaxi. During this year, he learned about the peasant struggle for land and about the plight of the country’s poor indigenous people. Most importantly, he also learned Kichwa, at feat to which few middle-class Ecuadorians can lay claim. Correa, unlike Evo, who is regularly subject to racist assaults in the press for his low level of formal education, is also widely considered to be “smart.” He studied abroad on full scholarship in Belgium and the United States, completed a PhD in Economics from the University of Illinois in 2001 and returned to Quito to take up a position as lecturer in economics at a prestigious university. Most importantly, Correa is considered to be a political outsider, which has given him wide room to maneuver in contemporary Ecuadorian politics.

Outsiders/Insiders: Social Movements and Political Parties

The crucial difference between these two governments is their relationships with social movements. Correa is an outsider in more respects than one: unlike Evo he has no formal ties with social movements and does not seem to be interested in forming them. The electoral platform created by Correa for the 2006 Presidential elections, Alianza Pais (AP), is not a formal political party but an electoral alliance composed of old parties of the Left, former members of Pachakutik (the political arm of the CONAIE, the country’s most important national indigenous federation) and a diverse assortment of middle-class intellectuals. As sociologists Franklin Ramírez and Analía Minteguiaga argue, this outsider status is part of the AP’s recipe for success. In April 2005, a social mobilization known as “*el forajido*” (the outsiders) brought down the government of Lucio Gutiérrez with the chant, “*Qué se vayan todos*” (Out with all politicians!). Since AP had never before participated in elections, its candidates could present themselves as political outsiders, or a new citizens’ movement far removed from the traditional party structure. AP did not put forward any congressional candidates, instead promising to call new elections for a Constitu-

ents’ Assembly that would be responsible for writing a new constitution. This strategy enabled AP to capitalize on the rampant anti-party sentiment amongst voters and demonstrated its willingness to follow through on its campaign promises.

The electoral results from the first round suggest that AP garnered widespread support from the indigenous and social movements which brought down the government of Lucio Gutiérrez in April 2005. Luís Macas, the candidate of the CONAIE (Ecuador’s largest national indigenous organization) came in with a mere 2.5% of the popular vote, compared to Correa’s 22.3%, which means that many of the nation’s indigenous population – estimated to be around 15% – voted for Correa. Leftist efforts to support Correa stepped-up in the second round, however, to prevent the election of Álvaro Noboa, a multimillionaire banana-magnate who won the first round with 26.7%. The rallying of the troops worked: after the second round, Correa became president of Ecuador with a decisive 57% of the votes.

The most frequent criticism of the AP’s “citizen’s revolution” from more radical elements of the Ecuadorian left is that it is based upon a liberal, individualistic politics that de-emphasizes the role of social movements. Decision-making within the AP is highly centralized and, according to some insiders, even authoritarian. After Correa was elected, he announced that he was investing more powers in the police and the military to repress popular protests. In April 2007 he followed through with that promise, sending in the troops to violently put down a protest against the mining activities of Toronto-based Iamgold. Due to these and other problems, CONAIE denounced Correa in a public statement on May 12 for failing to meet two of its main demands: to recognize Ecuador as a plurinational state in the new constitution and the requirement that communities must offer prior consent before large-scale mining and other major extractive projects take place.

Evo, on the other hand, maintains strong links with his social movement base, famously pronouncing that he aims to “command obeying the people.” Shortly after his inauguration as president, Evo was re-elected as the President of the six Federations of Coca Producers of the Chapare, a post that he has held since 1996. Given the MAS’s roots as the “political instrument” of the coca-growers, it is accurately described as a social-movement party. Due to these strong links with indigenous-peasant organizations, the MAS government has also made agrarian reform one of its policy platforms, a policy that has never been mentioned by Correa.

To observe that the MAS has strong links to social movements is not to argue that the latter embraces social movements wholeheartedly. Indeed, the government’s support for extra-parliamentary forms of popular power has tended to oscillate, depending on whether or not social movements’ actions conform to the government’s legislative agenda. In January 2007, for example, when violent clashes broke out in Cochabamba between MAS supporters and the pro-autonomy prefect in Cochabamba, the government lambasted social movement activists (including MAS Senator and peasant leader, Omar Fernández), insisting that the prefect be respected as a legitimately-elected political leader. →

Later, when the “autonomists” went on the offensive, the government embraced social mobilization calling on its supporters to hit the streets to provide the political strength necessary to pass the draft of the new Constitution through Congress. This political flip-flopping has created confusion amongst the supporters of the MAS, leading to demobilization in many sectors. Meanwhile, the oligarchy has been able to seize the initiative and even win a base of support amongst the masses, exacerbating the regional polarization, an issue that has played out most forcefully in the arena of the Constituent Assembly.

Constituent Assemblies: Re-founding the Nation

Social movements in both Bolivia and Ecuador have repeatedly called for new constitutions in order to remake the countries’ political landscapes. Evo and Correa were elected on promises to call Constituent Assemblies (CA), charged with the task of drafting new constitutions. In Bolivia the political process has been high-jacked by the opposition, while in Ecuador the CA has been designed in such a way to centralize the government’s control over the process.



Four months after taking office, Correa held a referendum asking citizens whether they wanted to re-found the nation with a CA. On April 15, 2007, over 80% of voters said “yes.” Upon winning the referendum, Correa submitted his resignation to Congress and dissolved parliament, calling new elections for a CA. In the elections held on September 30, the AP won 60% of the seats. The CA performs the legislative functions of government, which has facilitated the passing of progressive legislation. Deliberations began in January, 2008 in the coastal city of Montecristi. The 130 candidates are divided into 10 different “mesas” which are charged with the responsibility of holding public consultations and drafting articles, which are to be passed by majority vote. The CA is to sit for a maximum of 180 days with the possibility of a 60-day extension. Public debate has been about the substance of the new constitution instead of the process.

The MAS, on the other hand, has made compromises from the very beginning, which has made the CA a very messy and conflictual process. One of the key roadblocks on the road to reform is that the MAS controls the congress, but not the senate. This political weakness forced the MAS to make three debilitating compromises in the initial design of the CA. First, the party agreed to a rule that proposed changes to the constitution would require two-thirds of the assembly’s approval. Second, it required that candidates either be from a recognized political party or gather 15,000 signatures each – complete with fingerprints and identification card numbers – in just a few weeks, which barred participation of more radical social movement leaders not affiliated to political parties. Third, the election rules were designed in such a way that no one party could win two-thirds of the seats. The MAS won 53% of the seats in the CA elections of July 2, 2006 – the maximum possible for any one party, but short of the two-thirds needed to make decisive changes. Disagreements over procedural rules have dominated public debate rather than substance of the document.

The process of writing the new Magna Carta was quickly bogged down by quibbles over procedure. Initially, the right-wing in the *media luna*, who were resolutely opposed to the CA from the very beginning, rallied to preserve the two-thirds rule, which morphed into claims that the administrative capitol should be moved to Sucre and, as the movement gained strength, into the contemporary call for “autonomy.” A draft of the new constitution was finally approved in November 2007 by pro-government legislators in the absence of opposition politicians who were boycotting the proceedings. At the end of February 2008, Evo announced his intention of putting the document to popular vote on May 4th. The *media luna* high jacked the plan, responding with their own plans to host its own referendum on “autonomy.” Under pressure from the courts, the government postponed the vote, but the right wing in the department of Santa Cruz followed through.

The claims of the organizer that the referendum in Santa Cruz was a “popular plebiscite” representing the will of the people is highly questionable, given the context of violence, accusations of fraud and imperialist manipulation in which voting has taken place. Over the past decade, USAID and National Endowment for democracy have funneled an estimated \$120 million to the Boliv-

ian separatist movement. The right wing has waged a campaign of terror to block various MAS initiatives. In the past few years, the lives of Cuban doctors brought in by the MAS to work in poor barrios have been threatened. The office of CEJIS, an NGO engaged in research on the indigenous movement, was vandalized and documents related to land titles burned. Landowners in the region frequently resort to violence to maintain their labor force in conditions of “semi-slavery.” Indeed, Santa Cruz landowners are probably the largest armed group in Bolivia outside of the military.

On the day of voting, 35 people were injured in clashes between MAS supporters and the UJC and other factions. Eyewitnesses have reported that some stations were equipped with ballot boxes already stuffed with “yes” votes. Nonetheless, the results delivered a serious blow to the MAS government. While about 39% responded to the MAS’s call to boycott the vote (compared to the regular abstention rate of 20 to 25% for national elections), 82 % of the voters who turned out that day cast ballots in favour of “autonomy.”

Conclusion

The distinct physical and political geographies of the social struggles over hydrocarbons resources goes a long way to explain why divisive regional tensions have flared up in Bolivia but are unlikely to do so to the same extent in Ecuador. Although they have a common history of regional rivalry, regional tensions cannot fully explain the different dynamics of the political transitions in Ecuador and Bolivia, for the MAS has made some crucial strategic mistakes.

While promising to “rebuild the nation” and “decolonize the state,” the MAS has found itself tied to the institutions of the past. The MAS has also tended to distrust the self-organization of the most radical wings of the peasantry and working class, calling for extra-parliamentary forms of popular mobilization only when convenient for its reformist program. The MAS’s blunders have given the right ample time to re-organize itself. And so far, the latter has managed to keep two steps ahead of the government. While the political agenda in the first half of the decade was set by left-wing social movements, it is now clearly being set by the right. Meanwhile, the country’s constitutional future hangs in balance.

Correa appears to have learned at least one valuable lesson from his Andean neighbor: When formal political institutions are rotten to the core, it is better to raze them to the ground than to try and renovate them in an ad hoc fashion. Compared to the MAS in Bolivia, the AP government has therefore acted in a more strategic, although highly ‘top-down,’ fashion. While it may be tempting to jump to the conclusion that Correa’s self-styled “citizens’ revolution” will be more successful, any spaces opened by the new constitution are unlikely to foment true structural change unless they build upon the energy of organized forms of popular participation, that is, of social movements. **R**

Susan Spronk, a student at York University, would like to thank Liisa North and Jeff Webber for their comments on this article.

Bolivia's Post-Referendum Conjuncture

Jeffery R. Webber

“Summing up the aims of the new regime, Villarroel uttered his most memorable refrain: ‘We are not enemies of the rich, but we are better friends of the poor.’ This impossible pledge to favor the poor without estranging the rich – couched in a language of intimate ties – encapsulates the military populist’s ambitious but doomed reformism.” Thus writes historian Laura Gotkowitz of Colonel Gualberto Villarroel’s government in the early 1940s.

Villarroel was captured and hanged by protesters in the Plaza Murillo in La Paz, just outside the Presidential Palace, on July 14, 1946. International capital and the Stalinist *Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria* (Party of the Revolutionary Left, PIR) helped to channel these protests in a counter-revolutionary direction. The tin-mining and large-landowning oligarchy that had been threatened by the reforms of military populism in the post-Chaco War period of the late 1930s and early 1940s began its restoration after Villarroel’s lynching.

The period between 1946 and 1952 – under the regimes of Enrique Hertzog (1947-1949), Mamerto Urriolagoitia (1949-1951), and Hugo Ballivián (1951-1952) – came to be known as the *sexenio*. The era was marked by authoritarianism and repression in the face of rural and urban unrest, constituting essentially the ultimate effort to restore the oligarchy before it was strongly challenged again in the 1952 National Revolution.

Between April 9 and 11, 1952, an insurrection led by Hernán Siles Zuazo of the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, MNR) quickly escaped the boundaries of the basic coup envisioned by the MNR leadership.

Popular militias of factory workers and miners, and MNR rank-and-file militants and urban dwellers, overran most of the armed forces of the *ancien regime*, compelled swathes of low-ranking troops to switch sides, and sent many of the remaining hostile forces fleeing into exile. Chaco war veterans were armed with their twenty-year-old weapons, miners were equipped with the dynamite of their trade, and the mutinous troops who joined the revolutionary forces brought with them the arms of the state. The coercive apparatuses of the old order caved in almost completely under the weight of revolutionary advance.

The counter-revolutionary whip of two early coup attempts against the MNR regime, helped to spur radical direct actions on the part of the revolutionary Marxist tin miners and militant sectors of the indigenous peasantry. The Trotskyist *Partido Obrero Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Workers’ Party, POR) also made a crucial contribution to the radicalization of the revolution in this period. Between 1952 and 1956, the major reforms of the revolution had been won: the nationalization of three big mining compa-

nies and the establishment of the public mining company, COMIBOL; agrarian reform; and universal suffrage.

Tragically, however, those social forces seeking revolutionary socialist transformation lost out to the right-wing of the MNR’s populism over time. Beginning in 1956 the MNR introduced a reactionary economic stabilization plan backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). With the help of the US imperialism, the MNR disarmed the popular militias and rebuilt a professional army.

In 1964, the right wing took advantage of this scenario and René Barrientos came to power through a military coup. The reforms of the revolution were steadily reversed, and Bolivia entered a long and dark era of dictatorship until the return of electoral democracy in 1982 – achieved, again, by the militancy of indigenous peasants and revolutionary workers.

The Centre-Left government of the *Unidad Democrática Popular* (Democratic Popular Unity, UDP), under the leadership of the same Hernán Siles Zuazo, came to office in 1982. Popular aspirations for moving from limited electoral democracy to socialist and indigenous-liberationist democracy had rarely been so stoked. Yet again, however, these aspirations were crushed and capitalist power restored in just three years. The Siles regime inherited from the antecedent right-wing dictatorships an enormous external debt, low growth rates, and uncontrollable inflation.

The UDP’s strategy of seeking compromise between the IMF, the US state, and important fractions of domestic capital proved disastrous. The UDP coalition itself fragmented, as the *Central Obrera Boliviana* (Bolivian Workers Central, COB) from the Left, and the *Confederación de Empresarios Privados de Bolivia* (Confederation of Private Entrepreneurs of Bolivia, CEPB) from the Right, organized opposition to the new governments in the streets. Benefiting from the chaos of hyperinflation, a new neoliberal right-wing coalition emerged and fundamentally transformed the political economy of the country when it came to power in 1985 – ironically, under the leadership of Paz Estenssoro and a revamped MNR.

The new MNR government ushered in the most severe neoliberal restructuring in Latin America since the policies of Pinochet’s regime of terror in neighbouring Chile in the mid-1970s. The popular capacities of the largely indigenous working classes and peasantry were hammered as domestic and international capital reasserted their authority in the country. For fifteen years (1985-2000), there was no serious opposition to this right-wing neoliberal assault.

The tide began to turn again in 2000 with the heroic Cochabamba Water War, which ignited five subsequent years of left-indigenous insurrection in the countryside and cityscapes of Bolivia. The insurrectionary cycle reached its apogee in the “Gas Wars” of 2003 and 2005, with their base in the western *altiplano* (high plateau) and the twin cities of El Alto and La Paz. Two neoliberal presidents – Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and Carlos Mesa – were overthrown in less than two years.

Lacking a revolutionary party and project to overthrow the existing capitalist state and rebuild a new sovereign power rooted in the self-governance of the largely indigenous proletarian and indigenous majority, however, the insurrectionary cycle of 2000-2005 was channeled once again into the more domesticated terrain of electoral politics, in which the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement Towards Socialism, MAS) party was the only viable option for voters who sought change of internally colonial race relations and the system of capitalist exploitation in the country.

It was in this context that Evo Morales won 54% of the vote in the elections of December 2005, despite the MAS’s absence in the streets during the 2003 revolts and support for the neoliberal government of Mesa during its first 14 months in office.

During the first two and a half years in office Morales’ administration has given concession after concession to the extremist autonomist Right of the *media luna* departments – Santa Cruz, Pando, Beni and Tarija, while offering only moderate reforms to its popular constituency. It has declared socialism to be an impossible aim in the country for 50 to 100 years, and instead seeks “Andean-Amazonian” capitalism that tries to reconcile the conflicting interests of imperialism and capital on one side and those of the impoverished peasantry and working classes on the other. The right wing has used the space provided to it by the MAS to rearticulate its political bases from historic lows in 2003 and 2005, to a situation of dominance in half the country, including in the richest and most populated department of Santa Cruz.

This is the historical backdrop that needs to be taken into account when we consider the meaning of the referendum results of August 10, 2008. Bolivia is living once again through a critical moment.

It would be a tragedy of immense proportions for left-indigenous forces and the Morales government to follow the paths of Villarreal in the late 1940s, the MNR of the 1950s, and the UDP government of the early 1980s. Viewed together these experiences represent the signature failure of left-wing populism when it does not confront the economic and political power bases of the urban capitalist and landowning elite, even in situations when popular mobilization and radicalization was positioned to make these sorts of inroads on elite control of society.

The restoration of right-wing power – today articulated through a fiercely racist “autonomist” movement – must be stopped by a shift in the MAS’s moderate reformism to revolutionary audacity. This will depend on the self-organization of the

popular classes and indigenous majority to mobilize strategically against imperialism and the *media luna* racist elite, and to force the Morales government off its track of conciliation with the far-Right.

It will also depend on the widest international anti-imperialist efforts to combat the financing and training of Bolivia’s autonomist Right, support for the Morales regime when it makes reforms that improve the livelihoods of the popular majority and their chances of pushing reforms further, and solidarity with the worker and peasant radicals that are seeking to transcend the strict parameters of the reformist government.

The August Referendum, 2008

Over 400 observers from the Organization of American States (OAS), the Latin American Council of Electoral Experts, and parliamentarians from Europe and Mercosur countries (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay) were present for the recall referendums of 8 departmental (state) prefects (governors) and President Morales and Vice-President Álvaro García Linera on August 10. All stood to lose their jobs or reinforce their support base.

Referendum day went relatively smoothly, with the only reported irregularities being intimidation of voters in the *media luna* departments by the proto-fascist *Unión Juvenil Cruceñista* (Cruceño Youth Union, UJC) – the thuggish, racist, and pathetic shock troops of the autonomist Right. Turnout was an exceptional 83%.

Voters were asked to decide whether prefects and the President and Vice-President should continue in their positions. In the case of Morales and García Linera, voters were also asked whether they favoured the continuation of the government’s process of change. The results – based on the 96% of counted ballots available on August 14 – are depicted in Tables I and II.

Perhaps the most striking component of the results is that Morales and García Linera increased their nationwide support by 14% compared to the December 2005 elections. Their support increased in every department save Chuquisaca. On the question of prefects, too, right-wingers Manfred Reyes Villa of Cochabamba and José Luis Paredes of La Paz lost their posts – although the deeply undemocratic Reyes Villa initially said he would not step down. According to the referendum law, Morales will appoint interim prefects in these departments until new elections are scheduled.

Many on the Left have taken the results as a triumphant victory for the MAS’s “democratic and cultural” revolution. Speaking at the Presidential Palace – *Palacio Quemado* – on the evening of the vote, Morales suggested the large turnout was a “democratic festival of the Bolivian people.” He rejoiced in the “triumph of the democratic and cultural revolution of the Bolivian people. We dedicate this to all the revolutionaries of Latin America and the world.”

On the one hand, Morales stressed that his government had won a new mandate for moving forward: “What the Bolivian →

people expressed today with their vote is their support for this process of change. Therefore, I want to say to the Bolivian people, with much respect, that we are here to continue advancing the recovery of our natural resources, the consolidation of nationalization, and the recovery of our state enterprises.”

At the same time, he promised reconciliation with the opposition and the recognition of the *media luna*'s demands for departmental autonomy: “But I also want to say brothers and sisters, we are convinced that it is important to unite Bolivians, and the participation of the Bolivian people works to unite the different sectors of the countryside and the city, the east and the west. And that unity will be brought together in the New Political Constitution of the Bolivian State with the autonomous statutes.” He called on “patriotic business people” to help the government help the poor.

Even before the referendums were held, much media attention across Latin America was generated by a meeting in La Paz of the *Red de redes en defensa de la humanidad* (Network of Networks in Defense of Humanity), a group of famous artists and intellectuals from across the region, formed in Mexico in 2003. The group released a statement on July 29 denouncing the exploitation and oppression of the indigenous majority in Bolivia and expressing their solidarity with the MAS government:

“The groups that dominated Bolivia for decades, and that still maintain the major part of economic and media power, are the same groups that subjugate to poverty, underdevelopment and racial discrimination the vast majority of the population.” Referring to the large numbers of Bolivians who have emigrated to work outside the country, the declaration states: “Three million Bolivians have felt obliged to search for the minimal conditions for their survival in other countries. This tendency will only be reversed when the economic structure of the nation can recuperate from the injustice, inequality and exclusion it has suffered until now.” They came “to support the revolutionary and democratic process that the Bolivian people and the government of Evo Morales are pushing forward.”

While the denunciations made by artists and intellectuals of injustice, racism, and inequality are exemplary, the unadulterated celebration of the expected results of the referendum before, and the actual results after, seem to neglect some crucial components of what the referendum has meant.

The autonomist Right never expected to oust Morales and García Linera at the national level. Of course, Reyes Villa (Cochabamba) and Paredes (La Paz) did not want there to be a recall referendum in the first place. They objected when PODEMOS, the main right-wing party that holds a majority in the Senate, supported the referendum law because they expected to be kicked out by the voters who hated them.

Table I – President and Vice-President

Department	%Vote in Favour	%Vote National Elections
	August 2008	December 2005
Chuquisaca	54	54
La Paz	83	67
Cochabamba	71	65
Oruro	83	63
Potosí	78	58
Tarija	50	32
Santa Cruz	38	33
Beni	42	17
Pando	53	21
Nationwide	68	54

But in terms of the short-term strategy of the autonomist Right, Reyes Villa and Paredes were relatively expendable. What counted was gaining the bourgeois respectability of legal recognition for departmental autonomy in the core *media luna* departments. The illegal and widely-condemned autonomy referendums in those departments earlier this year were insufficient for moving forward with the concrete enactment of “autonomy,” asserting departmental control over natural gas and agro-industrial wealth.

After these latest legal referendums, right-wing autonomists maintain their control of five of nine departments – Pando, Beni, Santa Cruz, Tarija, and Chuquisaca. What’s more, they have increased their popular support in these departments, and laid the basis for a destabilization campaign against the Morales government, the assertion of new controls over their department’s natural resources, and the beginnings of a campaign to prevent the MAS’s reelection in 2010 when its five year mandate ends – if toppling it through extra-parliamentary means proves impossible beforehand. This will reinforce “the de facto division of the country” and concede “to the subversive separatists a halo of legality they did not possess earlier.” To justify the illegal extension of departmental power over national wealth, the autonomists will invoke the referendum results of August.

The Morales government seems to be clinging to a naïve faith in the eastern lowland oligarchy’s openness to negotiation, and to playing by the rules of the game. Morales is seeking to combine some of the demands of the autonomists with its own objective of introducing the draft of a new Constitution – approved by the Constituent Assembly in Oruro some months ago – to a popular referendum. The Morales administration appears to be convinced that “Andean-Amazonian” capitalism is compatible

Table II – Departmental Prefects (Governors)

Department	% Vote	%Vote	%Vote
	12/2005	In Favour	Against
		August 2008	August 2008
LaPaz	38	36	64
Cochabamba	48	35	65
Oruro	41	51	49
Potosí	41	79	21
Tarija	46	58	42
Santa Cruz	48	67	33
Beni	45	64	36
Pando	48	56	44

The department of Chuquisaca had a new prefect voted in only last month, and thus did not hold a referendum.

with a softer version of bourgeois departmental autonomy in the *media luna*. But the right-wing autonomists want nothing more than to see this project of the MAS fail, for the government to stumble from one debacle to the next, and are showing clear signs of renewed destabilizing energies since the referendum.

The Belligerence of the Autonomists

In the immediate aftermath of the referendums Morales and García Linera invited the opposition prefects to La Paz to negotiate. But the Right has signaled that it is completely uninterested in achieving any national agreement or social pact with the MAS government.

Rubén Costas, the prefect of Santa Cruz, had this to say in the wake of his resounding victory: “This insensible, totalitarian, *masista*, incapable government has neglected the development of the people and only seeks to concentrate power and transform us into beggars before it.” Costas spoke of a “*masista* dictatorship” which has as its true intention the destruction of departmental autonomy. When denouncing the alleged role of Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez in propping up the Morales regime, he indulged in the same racist epithets characteristic of the Venezuelan opposition: “No to the big foreign monkeys!”

After showing up at negotiations with the government on August 14 for a few hours, the five right-wing prefects of Chuquisaca, Pando, Beni, Tarija, and Santa Cruz, ceremoniously broke off talks in a ritual that had clearly been rehearsed. Gathering together in Santa Cruz immediately after the La Paz meeting with Morales, the prefects called for a civic strike and mobilizations

for August 19; Chuquisaca’s prefect called for a new illegal referendum on departmental autonomy and insisted again that Sucre should be the new capital of the country; and all five departments declared that “national authorities” are unwelcome in their territory until various demands are met.

In the early evening of August 13, 2008, nine Molotov cocktails were hurled at the Santa Cruz offices of the indigenous rights organization, *Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social* (CEJIS). The police took over one hour to respond. This follows on earlier attacks on the offices in November 2007, and the general intimidation and frequent violence meted out against dissidents in the *media luna* departments.

Costas has interpreted the results of the referendum as a new mandate to drive forward the bourgeois autonomist agenda in Santa Cruz and the rest of the *media luna*. He has announced a host of illegal initiatives: the formation of a departmental Legislative Assembly; creation of a new departmental tax agency that will control and collect taxes on natural resources in the department; and the election of sub-governors within the department of Santa Cruz.

None of this should be surprising based on the seditious recent history of social forces behind autonomy. Working through their political party apparatus – PODEMOS –, departmental prefects and civic committees, and fascistic shock troops like the UJC (and similar groups recently formed in Sucre and Cochabamba), the Right repeatedly sought to destabilize the Constituent Assembly process and the Morales government throughout 2006 and 2007, to the point of raising the threat of civil war.

In the period immediately prior to the August referendums, a group of 200 autonomist reactionaries took over the Tarija airport, successfully impeding a planned meeting between the Presidents of Venezuela, Argentina and Bolivia. A tiny group of 35 autonomists were able to take over another airport. And a vehicle in which the Minister of the Presidency, Juan Ramón Quintana, was traveling, in the eastern lowland city of Trinidad, was shot at by autonomist forces.

The Morales government backed away from enforcing the law in each of these cases. Heinz Dieterich is correct to point out, “the counterrevolution has conquered ‘liberated zones’ in which the central government can’t enter.”

The Material Bases of Autonomy

A recent report on the relationship between natural gas and agro-industry and the autonomy conflicts in Bolivia argues that the concentration of land in Bolivia is the worst in the world after Chile. Much of the concentrated landholdings are located in →

Santa Cruz, the leading department in the autonomist movement. Branko Marinkovic, leader of the Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee, to take but one example, reportedly owns some 12,000 hectares (30,000 acres) of land.

Santa Cruz accounts for more than 2 million of Bolivia's inhabitants, 33.7% of its territory, and 28.2% of its GDP. Tarija, with only 4.9% of Bolivia's population, accounts for 60% of the country's natural gas production and 85% of gas reserves. Santa Cruz follows with 22.3% of production. In excess of 82% of natural gas production, then, is located in these two *media luna* states.

Under the current complex arrangement of distributing hydrocarbon (natural gas and oil) revenue – split between the national government, the national gas and oil company YPFB, prefectures, municipalities, and universities – the four *media luna* departments receive 30%. Meanwhile, the other five departments (with 79% greater population than the *media luna*) receive only 19.7%. This is on top of the fact that in 2007 the *media luna* departments had a per capita income of roughly 1.4 times that of the other five.

As Tom Lewis suggests, “The present political conjuncture in Bolivia is indeed contradictory. In principle, regional self-determination and the peoples' right to immediately recall their elected officials are pillars of democracy. But in today's Bolivia, ‘regional autonomy’ means handing over the country's wealth – lock, stock and barrel – to the most reactionary sectors of the Bolivian ruling class and to continued exploitation by the transnational corporations.”

The Government's Reformism: Soft on Oligarchs, Hard on Workers

The MAS bares considerable responsibility for allowing the autonomist Right to reconsolidate itself such as it has. In crafting the Constituent Assembly in 2006, the government distorted the revolutionary notion of the assembly envisioned by left-indigenous movements between 2000 and 2005, by seeking to make left-indigenous participation virtually impossible except through the party and by accommodating the Right, whose strength at the time it vastly overestimated.

The government has sought continuously either to demobilize autonomous rural and urban protest – such as invasions and occupations of large landholdings by landless peasants in the east in 2006, and urban revolt against Reyes Villa in Cochabamba in late 2006 and early 2007 – or to strategically mobilize its bases against the *media luna* (especially the *cocaleros* of the Chapare region), but within very strict perimeters, predetermined by government elites.

The *Federación de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto* (Federation of United Neighbourhood Councils of El Alto, FEJUVE-El Alto), one of the most powerful organizations in the 2000-2005 wave of revolt, has sadly lost its independence from the government and

is unable to mobilize its bases effectively to advance the cause of the city's indigenous informal proletarian masses.

When, in October 2006, the government faced mobilizations of state-employed miners in Huanuni, who were demanding nationalization and workers' control, the miners were denounced by government officials as “Trotskyists” and “provocateurs.” Later that month when private cooperative mining interests, allied with transnational mining companies, attacked the state-employed miners, the government initially supported the cooperative miners rhetorically, and failed to send in the army to circumvent the bloodbath that followed.

Most recently, the same miners, with the support of the COB, struck against the MAS's neoliberal proposal for a new pension law. The state's coercive forces violently broke up a road blockade in the department of Oruro, leaving two miners dead and approximately 50 others wounded – some gravely. Contrast the treatment of the miners with that of the 200 proto-fascists who took over the Tarija airport.

The government has committed itself to fiscal austerity, low-inflationary growth and central bank independence. Its mining and labour market policies contain deep continuities with the antecedent neoliberal model. Its “agrarian reform” has failed to make consequential inroads on the landholdings of the agro-industrial elite of the eastern lowlands.

While the reforms in the hydrocarbons sector cannot be called nationalization, they have, in combination with elevated international prices, generated vast amounts of new revenue for the state. As a consequence of reforms of the hydrocarbons industry under the Mesa government in 2004, and subsequent reforms in 2006 by the Morales government, the Bolivian state has reaped impressive benefits from the high prices of natural gas: between 2004 and 2007 there was an increase of \$1.3 billion, roughly 10% of the country's GDP.

But a recent report by a Centre-Right Bolivian economist suggest that these revenues have not in fact been redirected to desperately needed social projects: “public investment has increased significantly over the past two years, rising from \$629 million in 2005 to \$1,103 million in 2007. Most of the new funds have been spent on roads and other infrastructure totaling close to 60% of total investments in 2007. Social investment has decreased over this period to less than 30% of total investments in 2007.”

The same report argues that the government's 2006 National Development Plan (NDP) – the most significant document outlining its development strategy to date – is a “relatively eclectic development plan, one that borrows freely from dependency theory, indigenous multiculturalism, social-democratic protection policies and neoliberal monetary and exchange rate policy.”

On the reforms to the hydrocarbons industry, the report concludes that they cannot be considered nationalization “in the conventional or historical sense – via expropriation or

changes in property regimes.” While revenues for the state have increased, real wages have declined when inflation is taken into account.

Revolutionary Advances or Populist Complacency?

The fact that Morales and García Linera enjoy 68% popular support is indeed an opportunity to move forward with a more direct confrontation with the logic of capital. But the government needs to veer drastically away from conciliation with the eastern lowland oligarchy, and recognize that there are zero-sum class questions that cannot be avoided.

No justice for landless indigenous peasants will be forthcoming without expropriations of large landholdings. There cannot be justice for workers while real wages are falling and miners are being killed in the streets. There cannot be a “democratic and cultural revolution” in Bolivia so long as Guaraní indigenous people remain literally enslaved to masters in parts of the country. There cannot be authentic democracy without workers’ control and democratic social coordination of the economy.

All of this necessitates confronting capitalists and imperialism. While such a route has been made more difficult by the renewed legitimacy of the autonomist movement following the referendums, the rearticulation of the Right is not yet complete. “Autonomy” has only ever been an objective for the Right when it was too weak to conquer state power at the national level.

Today, neoliberalism is perceived as an entirely exhausted and illegitimate project by much of the Bolivian population. The autonomist Right, though, has no alternative to offer, other than autonomy and the destabilization of Morales’ “dictatorship.” There is still a window of opportunity through which a right-wing counterrevolution – along the lines of those that followed Villaruel in the 1940s, the MNR in the 1950s, and the UDP government of the early 1980s – can be circumvented.

Such a victory over the Right, such an advance toward socialism from below and indigenous liberation, will not be a consequence of the benevolent goodwill of leaders such as Evo Morales or Álvaro García Linera. It will depend on the rejuvenation of popular indigenous and left forces in rural and urban areas across Bolivia. The recent historical roots for such a project are to be found in the uprisings that galvanized the country between 2000 and 2005.

Recent statements by the COB during the most recent miners’ struggle against the pension law, and the factory workers, during a recent hunger strike in Cochabamba, suggests that the shadow cast by the revolts of October 2003 and May-June 2005 continues to resonate. On August 1, 2008 the executive committee of the COB released the following resolution:

“The Bolivian Workers Central, loyal to its glorious history of revolutionary struggle, will never be a political instrument of the oligarchy and imperialism. Our iron commitment is with the defense of the democratic political process opened up in the heroic days of October 2004 [sic., 2003] and May-June 2005 with the blood of the Bolivian people and workers. We are convinced that the revolutionary, patriotic and popular forces have to unite in a single front to crush the oligarchy and imperialism, but not at the cost of giving up our social rights that have been curtailed by neoliberalism, much less of getting caught up in the political games [*pongueaje politico*] of this or any other government.” The documents calls on the unity of the workers and the Bolivian people, solidarity against the oligarchy and imperialism, and for driving out the right-wing of the MAS, led by Vice-President Álvaro García Linera.

Unfortunately, it would be wildly misleading to suggest that the COB’s resolution reflects the leading ideas of left-indigenous sectors on the ground in Bolivia today. Rather, there has been a demobilization of independent political action from below and an increasing reliance on elite level negotiations between the MAS leadership and the autonomist oligarchy – when the latter decides to participate.

Recent weeks in Latin America have seen the inauguration of Paraguay’s new President, Fernando Lugo, a former priest and liberation theologian. The Left has celebrated this addition to the “pink tide” in the region. Simultaneously, there have been wide-scale celebrations of Morales’ seeming victory through recall referendums.

But there is a danger of complacency in the air. *The Economist*, one of the most important mouthpieces of international capital, recently pointed out that for all the talk of a “pink tide” Mexico, Peru, and Colombia remain in the hands of the hard-Right, while the “Left” in Latin America includes many governments – such as Lula’s in Brazil – that have in practice reinforced neoliberal policies.

The London magazine concludes: “The past few years of rapid economic growth have helped incumbent governments of all sorts. The next period looks tougher. To make matters worse for the incumbents of the left, the two issues now uppermost in Latin American minds are inflation and crime, which both tend to move votes to the right. This gives the centre-right an opportunity to regain ground – though the conservatives will need to arm themselves with credible policies both to reduce poverty and to promote equality of opportunity.”

A cursory glance at the coverage in the main opposition papers in Bolivia and Venezuela in recent weeks suggest that the Right is counting on these opportunities. **R**

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Haiti and the Politics of Containment



Review by Roger Annis

Peter Hallward,
Damming the Flood:
Haiti, Aristide and the Politics of Containment,
442 pp. Verso, 2007.

In April, mass protests against hunger and rising food prices erupted in Haiti and led to the fall of the government. On April 18, Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis resigned following a vote of non-confidence in Haiti's senate. The vote was orchestrated by some of Haiti's wealthy elite, seeking to bring the government of President René Prével more directly under their control.

The story of hunger in Haiti goes far beyond recent hikes in world food prices. The country's crushing poverty — it is the poorest country in the Americas — is the result of decades of exploitation and interference by the world's big powers, principally the United States, with Canada and France increasingly joining in. This important new book tells that story.

In 1986, a popular uprising overthrew the Duvalier family dynasty, one of the most ruthless tyrannies in modern history. Four times since then, in 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2006, the Haitian people have elected governments that promised socially-progressive policies. The first three in fact encouraged and supported Haiti's peasant farmers so that the country could become food self sufficient.

Two of those governments were overthrown, in 1991 and 2004, by Haiti's elite and its foreign backers. Both times, the ousted president was Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Catholic priest and advocate of liberation theology, now living in exile in South Africa. The U.S., Canada and France directly backed Aristide's overthrow in 2004 by sending thousands of soldiers and police to finish an

assault begun by Haitian paramilitaries. The foreign intervention was sanctioned by the UN Security Council.

Peter Hallward's new book tells the tragic tale of 2004. *Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide and the Politics of Containment* is a hard-hitting and thoroughly-researched exposé of the international conspiracy that led to the latest overthrow of Haitian democracy and sovereignty. The "flood" in the title refers to the political movement and party, created by Aristide and his colleagues, known as "Lavalas," a word in Haiti's Kreyol language that expresses the imagery of the Biblical flood sweeping away an unjust and immoral social order.

Canadian-born Hallward is a professor of philosophy at Middlesex University in London, UK. His book, acclaimed by Noam Chomsky and Dr. Paul Farmer, themselves authors on Haiti, systematically demolishes the lies and distortions that have been spread in the countries of the big-three conspirator governments — the U.S., Canada and France.

The conspiracy was presented as salvation for the Haitian people, as "liberation" from Aristide's allegedly repressive government. Hallward sums up the conspiracy in these words:

"The effort to weaken, demoralize then overthrow Lavalas in the first years of the twenty-first century was perhaps the most successful exercise of neo-imperial sabotage since the toppling of Nicaragua's Sandinistas in 1990... Not only did the coup of 2004 topple one of the most popular governments in Latin America, but it managed to topple it in a manner that wasn't recognized as a coup at all."

Damming the Flood describes the calamitous consequences of two years of foreign-imposed government following the 2004

overthrow, including widespread killings and jailings of Aristide supporters, economic ruin, and deepening misery for the majority of the Haitian population. The book's narrative ends in 2007, but readers will find many keys to understanding the social calamity that continues to unfold, two and a half years after the election of René Préval in February 2006 and four and a half years after the U.S., Canada and France seized effective control of the country.

Préval has disappointed the Haitian masses who voted overwhelmingly for him. He has bowed to demands to surrender Haiti's beleaguered economy to international capital, including privatizations of the few remaining public enterprises. He has done little to stand up to foreign police and military rampaging through the vast, poor neighbourhoods where people cling to the dream of a return of Aristide and the reform policies of his Fanmi Lavalas party.

Hallward describes the array of domestic and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and "left" parties whose material interests and blind hostility to the post-year 2000 government of President Aristide led them into an alliance with imperialism and the Haitian elite in the 2004 coup. They supported Aristide's overthrow and then became complicit with the massive human rights violations that followed.

The scope of this betrayal will shock many readers. Among the partners in the reactionary alliance against Lavalas are the leaders of Haiti's failed Stalinist parties; former allies of Aristide within the Fanmi Lavalas party; the Communist Party of France; a multitude of NGOs in the U.S., France and Canada, including the not-so-alternative Montreal-based left-media NGO Alternatives; the Quebec Federation of Labour; parties of the "Socialist" International, including Canada's New Democratic Party and France's Socialist Party; and the political/quasi-trade union Haitian grouping known as Batay ouvriye (Workers Struggle).

Hallward also documents the silence or complicity of such agencies as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch in response to post-coup human rights violations.

Haiti today

Hallward's book is an emotionally difficult read. It is hard to imagine that a people can survive all that

has been thrown its way in Haiti — poverty, political violence, environmental degradation, loss of political sovereignty — only to have its fate largely ignored by "progressive" world opinion. Still, the author expresses cautious optimism for the future.

As demonstrated by the remarkable events surrounding the 2006 election, the popular movements in Haiti retain a strong and defiant capacity to mobilize. New, younger leaders are moving to the fore.

And important lessons have been drawn from the Aristide years. One of the strengths of *Damming the Flood* is its recounting of Haitian rethinking about the past 25 years. Could Aristide and his movement have taken more decisive measures to counter imperialist sabotage of their social and political project?

The foreign military and political presence in Haiti, a reading of the book suggests, is weaker than surface appearances might suggest. **R**

Roger Annis is an aerospace worker in Vancouver and a coordinator of the Canada Haiti Action Network. He is the author of the new Socialist Voice pamphlet *Haiti and the Myth of Canadian Peacekeeping*.



