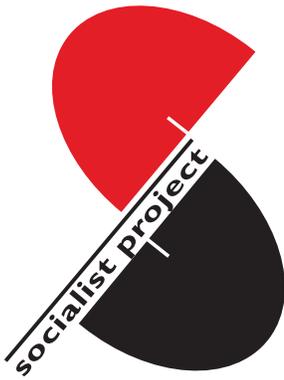


RELAY

A SOCIALIST PROJECT REVIEW

The Dexter NDP • An Inconvenient Party
Chinese Revolution
Emerging Left • Latin America
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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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What Should We Do To Help Build a New Left?

Greg Albo and Herman Rosenfeld

Marta Harnecker's, *Rebuilding the Left* (London: Zed Books, 2007) lays out an important message on the state of the Left in the struggle against neoliberalism:

“We live in a world that is nothing like the world of 50 years ago... We live in a world where capitalism in its most brutal guise, neoliberalism, uses technological advances for its own benefit and is wreaking havoc on much of the world's population and ruthlessly destroying nature... pushing social groups and whole nations into collective neglect. A growing discontent, nevertheless, has begun to make itself felt among extended social sectors... We need to rebuild the Left... our efforts should be realistically focused on changing the current balance of power so that what appears to be impossible today becomes possible tomorrow.” (pp. 1-2).

In spite of the discrediting of the ideology of neoliberalism in North America, there is no easy space for the Left to ‘fill.’ Neoliberalism in its practical form is embedded in the way most people think and the everyday

realities they live, including workers. It remains in the acceptance of private markets as the only way to organize society, in the lack of experience with collective struggles and solutions, and in that most of us confront the daily struggle to survive on an increasingly individualized basis. Neoliberalism has accomplished two of its central goals: making all of us more dependent on the market for our livelihoods and thus more subject to market disciplines; and disorganizing the Left politically and marginalizing non-market democratic alternatives from the space of politics. Actually existing liberal democracy has become the best ‘political shell’ for neoliberal capitalism.

The defeat of the Left and the workers’ movement dates from the end of the post-war boom and the militant attempts through the 1970s to develop alternatives in multiple forms – a radicalized social democracy, reform communism, liberation struggles carrying the banner of socialism, workers’ control and participatory democracy movements, and still others. The ascendancy of neoliberalism to revitalize capitalist power as a response to these developments still haunts us. This also

has deeper roots in the often ossified ways that Marxism was translated into the political, cultural and economic realities of developed capitalist society. These are part of our difficulty in developing a ‘21st century socialist’ vision, and in finding ways to apply socialist thinking today to the needs of segmented and unorganized working classes.

AN AGENDA FOR REBUILDING

Even as capitalism unsteadily moves into recovery from the current crisis – the deepest economic crisis in seventy years – its impacts will persist. The IMF as well as national economic authorities and financial interests are already warning that a decade of austerity is at hand. The coming fights over wage rollbacks, concessions and public sector cuts will necessarily pre-occupy many impending struggles. These need to be turned from defences against further attacks on workers into political confrontations with neoliberalism and capitalism. They cannot be limited to particular issues and single struggles. To do that, we need to push beyond the present disorganization and divisions of the Left to what Harnecker refers to as ‘the creation of an alternate social bloc’ (p. 32). We could do much worse than start with the following, which constitute a very small part of what needs to be done. But they would certainly contribute to building a socialist agenda and organizational capacity in North America, and in particular Canada, taking the Left out of the margins it now resides in.

First, there is no way to avoid sustained building of alternate communications, publications and educative capacities for socialist ideas and analysis. There is no building socialists

Neoliberalism has accomplished two of its central goals: making all of us more dependent on the market for our livelihoods and thus more subject to market disciplines; and disorganizing the Left politically and marginalizing non-market democratic alternatives from the space of politics.

without socialist media that can contest the daily interpretation of events, sustain more critical analyses of capitalism and form activist cadre. This, of course, includes using the most contemporary forms of media allowed by the internet, but also more traditional forms. A socialist press is indispensable as an organizer of the movement across different workplaces, communities and countries. Educational centres which cut across current campaigns are absolutely central for deepening understanding of issues, but also in developing the skill set of cadre as organizers and grounded community leaders.

Second, there is a need to work among the different segments of the working class, gaining a deeper understanding of how to build class unity and how to mobilize and inspire workers to fight-back. This involves work in community struggles, workplaces and in and around trade unions and other popular organizations, and the creation of new forms of struggle and resistance such as community and workers' assemblies. We have to learn how to generate and consolidate socialists from within the working class and experiment with different kinds of demands and strategies. There is, for example, in Canada and North America today no coherent network of socialists cutting across unions supporting strikes, leading workplace actions and agitating for a programme of democratic reform and political demands.

Third, socialist approaches to the environmental crisis need to be explored and movements built around them, and challenge the ecology movement's drift toward its vulgar embrace of market solutions and its utopian and nativist vision of localist enclaves. This is a long-term imperative in terms of addressing climate change, loss of habitats and species and so forth. But it is also an immediate need to address the needs of daily life and the saturation of human bodies with a diet of junk food and an endless slurry of pollutants; the necessity of reducing work-time; and the social imperative to contest the massive burden of environmental injustices borne by workers and racial and indigenous minorities.

Fourth, there is a political urgency to working together as socialists to build toward higher forms of unity: the era of small group attitudes and organizing around a singular issues is, at long last after decades of isolation and marginalization, over. Socialist regroupment, the bringing together socialists from different Left ideological currents, as well as newer and young socialists, are taking place around the world. But too often those tendencies formally committed to building a new socialist politics remain stuck in their own conceptual and organizational ghettos (unable to break from the self-identification of what Marx ridiculed long ago as the bearers of 'one true socialism').

That is one component and, in terms of the scale of the work at hand, a relatively minor one. Another is building an organized socialist current across the union movement that is not organized just as unionists connected to activists in other unions, but as part of a wider emerging socialist politics. As well, the networks, coalitions, and social forum need to push beyond these most minimal forms of linking struggles and become an integral component of deeper political organization. These kinds of initiatives have either sputtered or collapsed back into singular issue politics. They need to become part of movement building again, with much deeper organizational commitments, to actually contest the neoliberal project which has animated their politics.

In Canada we have to seriously engage in this kind of project. It means not only working together on common campaigns (that has gone in major ways through the battles against free trade and imperialist wars to current struggles for Palestinian solidarity, immigrants' rights and against the intensification of NAFTA and the security state). But also to map out plans to build new kinds of socialist political organizations. This would involve, among other things, debate and discussion of the key theoretical and practical issues we face and, in the process, clarifying them.

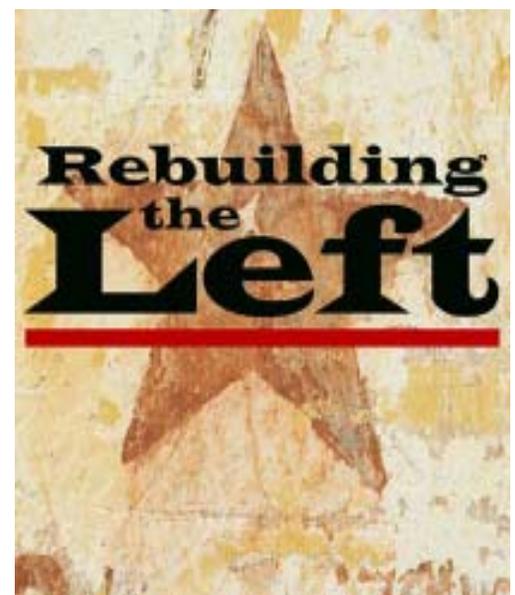
A NEW POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

In her exploration of the characteristics of the new political instrument that the Left needs to build, Harnecker sums up:

“in order to respond to the new challenges set by the twenty-first century we need a political organisation which, as it advances a national programme which enables broad sectors of society to rally round the same battle standard, also helps these sectors to transform themselves into the active subjects building the new society for which the battle is being waged” (p. 99).

This is, indeed, critical to rediscovering politics as making alternatives possible – the creative possibilities in all of us as an animating principle of a new revolutionary politics. In the actions taken today in the building a new correlation of political forces, in our workplaces and communities, the constricting grip of neoliberalism might at last be broken, and new kinds of political futures again be explored. **R**

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The Dexter NDP: Old Wine, New Bottle?

Matt Fodor

“I’ve waited all my life to see a socialist government in Nova Scotia. I’m still waiting.”

– Voter email read on CBC Newsworld on election night¹

On June 9, 2009 the New Democratic Party (NDP), led by the self-proclaimed “conservative progressive” Darrell Dexter, swept to power in Nova Scotia, forming the first-ever NDP government in Atlantic Canada. The NDP won 45 percent of the popular vote and 31 of 52 seats. Despite this historic outcome, it should be noted that the NDP ran on a modest and uninspired platform. Therefore, it is difficult to declare the election a victory for the Left.

At the August 2009 federal NDP convention in Halifax, the newly-elected Premier Dexter called on the party to reach out to business. He argued that past efforts to do so were undermined by the party’s ‘rigid’ ideology. Dexter’s comments stood in sharp contrast to those of former federal leader Ed Broadbent, who made the case for defending traditional social democratic values. Broadbent stressed that universal healthcare, affordable education, government pensions and other measures supported by social democrats should be paid for “by adequate levels of progressive taxation.” Dexter insisted that his advocacy of tax cuts and reaching out to business was not a betrayal of the NDP’s core values, stating that: “The party is rooted in some very core values, and as long as we are grounded in those values I think we are free to take initiatives right across the political spectrum.” Dexter’s message was simple, get with the times: “This is not a party of the 1960s, we’re not a party of a generation ago, we’re a new modern political party.”²

Like other social democratic parties around the world, the NDP has been greatly impacted by the Third Way. In what is seen as a strategic response to the challenges of globalization and de-

clining electoral fortunes, the NDP accepts many neoliberal precepts and a greater role for markets. Third Way social democratic parties move to the right on such issues as taxes, welfare and crime in an opinion-poll driven attempt to appeal to the broad electorate. The Third Way is presented by advocates such as Anthony Giddens as an updated version of social democracy that serves as a middle ground between traditional social democracy and neoliberalism.³ The federal NDP, which unlike most social democratic parties has never formed the national government, continues to be embroiled in a debate between ‘traditional’ social democrats and those who advocate a more ‘pragmatic’ and centrist “Third Way” course. An examination of party platforms and policy positions over the past decade, however, suggests a rightward turn.⁴ It is generally accepted that NDP governments at the provincial level since the 1990s, most notably those of Roy Romanow and Lorne Calvert in Saskatchewan and Gary Doer in Manitoba, have adopted the Third Way. This can now also be said to be true of the Dexter government.

FROM OFFICIAL OPPOSITION TO POWER

The Nova Scotia NDP has pursued a Third Way course since at least the late 1990s. In the 1998 election, the party, led by Robert Chisholm, had its then best-ever performance, when it tied the incumbent Liberals in the number of seats won (the Liberals remained in power with the support of the Conservatives). In their 1999 budget, the Liberals broke their electoral commitment to balanced budgets to make investments in healthcare. The NDP joined the Conservatives in denouncing the Liberals for breaking that promise, resulting in their defeat. Jim Stanford observed that “it is strange indeed to see a left party taking the rhetoric of balanced budgets so far as to actually defeat a government on the grounds that it was spending too much on human services.” In the subsequent election, the NDP ran on

“...an extremely moderate...platform, stressing its commitment to fiscal responsibility, balanced budgets, and support for small business. The central goal was to emphasize that voting for the NDP did not mean voting for deficits, inefficiency, and turmoil. Third Way party strategists and even conservative newspaper columnists heralded the Nova Scotia NDP, under popular leader Robert Chisholm, as representing an energetic new wave for the party.”⁵

Despite this excitement in conservative quarters, the party lost ground but maintained their Official Opposition status, and the Conservatives swept to power on a right-wing platform. Tory cuts to public services were soon met with much public opposition. The NDP was unable to capitalize on this grassroots movement in support of public services, however. As Stanford, writ-



ing in 2001, observed: “By bringing down a government on the grounds that it failed to balance the budget, and making ‘fiscal prudence’ a centerpiece of its own campaign, the NDP clearly contributed to the emergence of the current regressive trend in Nova Scotia.”⁶

Dexter replaced Chisholm in 2003 and continued the centrist course. For instance, the NDP supported a Tory tax cut that benefited the wealthy, men and the Halifax region over the poor, women, and the other regions of the province.⁷ The 2003 election saw the NDP capture 31 percent of the popular vote and 15 seats (and maintain Official Opposition status); in 2006, the party received 35 percent of the vote and 20 seats (just one seat less than the Conservatives and far ahead of the Liberals). In the most recent election, the Tory government of Rodney Macdonald suffered a humiliating defeat, coming in third behind the Liberals. With the NDP again promising tax cuts and balanced budgets, Brendan Haley notes that “the Conservatives’ [sic.] ‘Risky NDP’ Socialist Red Scare campaign was totally absurd and fell completely flat with voters tired of the ineptitude of their existing premier and comfortable with Darrell Dexter.”⁸

Specifically, the NDP ran on a platform called *Better Deal 2009: The NDP plan to make life better for today’s families*, with seven key commitments:

- create the secure jobs Nova Scotia’s economy needs
- keep emergency rooms open and reduce health care wait times
- ensure more young people stay and build a life in Nova Scotia
- take the tax off home energy and make life more affordable
- fix rural roads and keep communities strong
- give seniors the options to stay longer in their homes and communities
- live within our means

The commitment to “live within our means” is perhaps the most revealing of the party’s Third Way orientation, in which the platform attacks the previous Tory government for fiscal irresponsibility. It states that “Darrell Dexter and the NDP know that debt and deficits are not the road to prosperity.” It includes a commitment to balancing the budget within their first two years in office and an “expenditure management review” with a target of a 1% reduction (or \$73.5-million) in non-essential spending.⁹ The NDP appeared so committed to balanced budgets and curbing spending that the Halifax *Chronicle Herald* (May 16, 2009) commented that:

“Mr. Dexter sounds excessively cautious in saying future capital spending should not add to the debt. That would mean running budget surpluses large enough to cover new capital, often making it hard to both balance the budget and keep infrastructure up to date. A better approach is to keep the carrying costs of borrowing for new capital at a manageable level in the operating budget.”¹⁰

The inability to undertake necessary investments is hampered

further by the call to “take the tax off home energy and make life more affordable” – which comes at a price of \$28-million and is by far the most expensive part of the platform. Eric Newstead notes that the rest of the platform planks “are either relatively inexpensive and uninspiring band-aids or based around temporary tax rebates similar to federal programs implemented by the Harper Tories.” Thus, “only the proposed cut to the HST on home energy use and the plan to balance the Province’s Budget really demonstrate the logic driving the new NDP government.”¹¹ Indeed, the second most expensive election plank (at an estimated \$10.5-million) to encourage home construction with a one-year HST rebate. The *Globe and Mail* columnist Andrew Steele praised Dexter’s moderate direction, yet noted that:

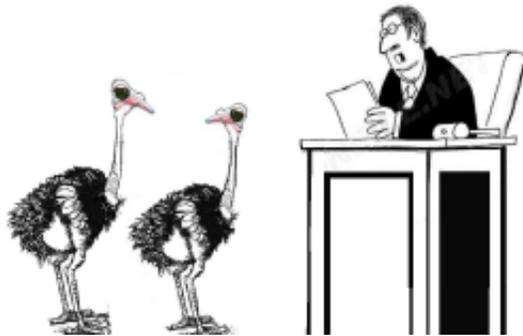
“...the party was focused on power over policy. Taking the HST off of home heating is bad policy and good politics, the equivalent of the GST cut pledged by Stephen Harper in 2006. The pledge to balance the budget was disingenuous at a time when the state of the finances is in flux, but necessary communications short-hand to demonstrate a commitment to sober management of the books. There was no vast manifesto of detailed pledges to addressing every faction the party grassroots feels is rightfully aggrieved, but a slender leaflet designed for sales, not debate. In fact, the platform was silent on poverty, arguably the core issue to the NDP across the country.”¹²

Not only did the party have little to say about poverty, but it was also silent on wages and the gap between rich and poor. There was no call whatsoever for furthering progressive taxation. Nor was there a call for anti-scab legislation or strengthening trade unions despite the NDP’s historic links to labour. Even a call for public automobile insurance from the previous election was dropped. If the pursuit of equality is a core social democratic value, it is difficult to see at all what is distinctively social democratic about the current Nova Scotia NDP.

What specifically are the “core values” of the NDP that Dexter spoke about at the Halifax convention? Regarding the lackluster platform on which the Dexter government was elected, Larry Haiven remarks:

“...the NDP will no doubt refer to Tommy Douglas in Saskatchewan. They may remind people...that Douglas insisted on balancing his province’s books as one of his first priorities. But Tommy Douglas was not just about balancing budgets... Tommy Douglas had social imagination; he had great ideas of what he was going to accomplish, like medicare, public automobile insurance, rural electrification, children’s dental care and many more. He announced these things publicly and lifted people’s spirits in the promise of what they could do collectively. He and his immediate successors took on the vested business and professional interests and rallied people to demand better. In recent years, NDP governments across Canada have been all about dampening people’s spirits, especially the party grassroots. The NDP has become a promise of better management of crisis.”¹³

You have been found guilty
of cold indifference to the needs of all Canadians



SCALING BACK EVER-MODEST GOALS

While many in the labour and social movements have expressed hope that the election of the first NDP government in Nova Scotia is a step in the right direction, there is little reason to be optimistic. There is already evidence of the NDP ending up on the *opposite side* of the popular movements when the Conservatives were in power and the NDP remains firmly committed to the neoliberal mantra of tax cuts, fiscal austerity and balanced budgets. And to dampen things further, the Dexter government has reported that the province's finances are in worse shape than expected.¹⁴ Haiven argues that this process may in fact be politically motivated. Given the current political orientation it is likely spending cuts are further ahead in order to maintain its major commitments, and it is necessary to convince the traditional NDP constituencies (for whom further spending cuts would be very unpopular) of this 'necessity.'¹⁵

In the Throne Speech on September 17, 2009, Dexter reiterated the party's key campaign platform themes. He noted that they had already reduced the size of the Cabinet from 18 to 12 members, and they had taken the HST off of home electricity. And they would follow through on the home construction rebate. Dexter stressed the party's commitment to "living within our means" and warned that "[i]f we do not make changes, Nova Scotia's deficit will balloon to \$1.3-billion by 2012. That is not the legacy this government wants to leave to future Nova Scotians."¹⁶ In the budget address the following week, Finance Minister Graham Steele stated that: "While this is the *first* budget tabled by this government... we do not consider it to be *our* budget. This budget is substantially the same as the budget introduced last May 4th." The government forecasted a deficit of \$592.1-million for 2009-2010, but maintains that it will balance the budget next year.¹⁷ We have yet to see an "NDP budget" for Nova Scotia, but there is little reason to believe that it will represent a break from politics as usual. Angella MacEwen and Christine Saulnier remark that "maybe we could have used a few surprises. Something more creative than dumping \$325-million into roads (the most money a Nova Scotian government has ever spent on roads in a single year)."¹⁸

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has outlined a more progressive economic strategy for Nova Scotia in its annual Alternative Budget. It rejects the emphasis on balanced budgets and maintains that adequately funded healthcare, education and social services should be a higher priority in a recession. It argues that the removal of the HST on home energy is misguided, noting that it saves the average Nova Scotian a mere \$10 per month but deprives the government of a significant amount of revenue. A better solution would be a subsidy for low income households. The re-nationalization of Nova Scotia Power would also enhance energy security. The report warns against the mantra of tax cuts, citing a study by CCPA economist Armine Yalnizyan that found that governments of all levels across Canada reduced their revenue by \$250-billion, depriving them of ability to sufficiently fund healthcare, education, social services, infrastructure, etc. The Alternative Budget stresses the need for a well-educated workforce in order for the province to come out better from the recession, which includes increasing funding for the province's neglected schools, investments in childcare, and reduced post-secondary tuition. Poverty reduction is also crucial, with the Alternative Budget calling for a 30% increase in social assistance rates. The Alternative Budget would be funded by increased taxes on the wealthy, with income above \$150,000 being taxed at a marginal rate of 30%.¹⁹

It should not be a surprise that priorities of the Dexter government are very much at odds with those of the socialist Left. Yet, it is striking how much they have moved from traditional social democratic goals. The first NDP government in the history of Atlantic Canada is, like recent provincial NDP governments elsewhere, continuing the project of pursuing more humane version of neoliberalism. Broadbent's call for an all-out assault on inequality sounds downright radical by today's standards. **R**

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An Inconvenient Party: The Manitoba NDP, Neoliberalism and Poverty

Chris Webb

On November 5th, Manitoba's new New Democratic Party (NDP) premier, Greg Selinger, heard the shouts of hundreds of students organized by the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) demonstrating outside the Manitoba Legislative Building demanding concrete action be taken against poverty. Had he graced the protestors with his presence he would have seen the energy of a diverse crowd tired of growing economic inequalities and band-aid solutions. Far from marking a new beginning, the Selinger response emphasized the desire to continue the legacy of the preceding NDP governments of Gary Doer (see incremental wage increases and lacklustre financing for social services). The NDP remains an inconvenient obstacle for those fighting to fill the gaps left by years of neoliberal restructuring and the present capitalist crisis. In a province under social-democratic control, those calling for progressive economic and social change need to carefully assess the nature of the provincial NDP and its new leadership.

The Manitoba economy, for example, has hardly been insulated from some of the main features of neoliberalism. Despite local economic forecasts proclaiming the strength of the provincial economy, employment rates are declining, child poverty rates remain high, and aboriginal poverty remains severe. Manitoba lost several thousand more jobs in October, pushing the unemployment rate from 5.3 to 5.8 per cent. Employers are on the offensive, demanding concessions from workers to maintain profitability. In the rural community of Pine Falls, to cite one of the more notable examples, 260 pulp and paper workers are currently locked out for refusing to accept drastic wage and benefit cuts. While GDP growth has remained steady, Manitoba isn't immune to national and international economic fluctuations. The emphasis in the 2009 Provincial Budget on maintaining business stability translates as ensuring business profitability by demanding concessions from workers rather than the business community.

THE SELINGER VICTORY

In this economic climate, NDP members chose to elect to the party helm former Finance Minister Selinger. His ascendancy speaks to the very nature of the provincial NDP. Selinger's leadership is essentially the distillation of years of neoliberal NDP policies. When we look at the neoliberal drift of the party under Gary Doer, in particular in economic policy, it is no surprise that a finance minister who oversaw a decade of 'fiscal austerity' should emerge as leader. In the leadership race, Selinger promised no change from the economic policies that have guided the party for the last decade. His support amongst NDP cabinet ministers and his unblemished image compared to the left-leaning Steve Ashton – branded a fiery socialist by the media – was an obvious choice for the party after the departure of Gary Doer,

who now serves as Canadian Ambassador to the U.S. for the Conservative government of Stephen Harper.

During his time as Finance Minister, Selinger oversaw personal and business tax cuts that deprived the province of over \$1-billion. These cuts overwhelmingly benefitted high-income families and hurt already underfunded social services. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reports that the income levels of poor Manitobans could be brought up to the poverty line for a cost of under \$516-million a year (or just 1.1 per cent of Manitoba's annual GDP). Selinger will continue Doer's legacy of leading the NDP down a centrist road by balancing business tax cuts with incremental investments in health and education, or what he calls "govern[ing] with warm hearts and cool minds." His strategy follows on the heels of Doer's wholesale adoption of this third-way social democracy: a middle ground between social democracy and neoliberalism. It comes as no surprise that the 2009 Manitoba budget reflects a decade long obedience to zero deficits, improved credit access for business, and lower taxes. This fiscal restraint has become mantra across the provincial political spectrum and reflects the ideological dominance of neoliberalism.

Selinger's victory in the leadership race should be a clear indication to the Left that working for change within the NDP is a battle that continues to be lost, as the NDP follows other social democratic parties into a realignment of their policies, organization and demobilization of its working class constituency. Labour leaders and community groups supported Selinger over the left-leaning Steve Ashton, who promised to reinstitute the tuition freeze and impose a ban on replacement workers during a strike. This is suggestive of how timid the Manitoba labour movement has become in challenging the NDP's political direction on even the most elemental of principles and legislative reform. In his nomination speech, Ashton challenged party members to create an inclusive party that gets back to its social-justice roots: "There is no reason why we cannot achieve social and economic justice for our population." The Doer government originally promised the business community not to bring in anti-scab legislation, and it is likely that neither will the Selinger one.

In the face of the economic crisis, the federal Conservative government has shaken some of their dogma and done an about-face on deficit spending. The Manitoba NDP, however, remains committed to tight fiscal spending through crippling anti-deficit laws. In addition, Manitoba's tax limitation laws make it incredibly difficult for the province to seek new revenue areas. The law caps personal and corporate taxes unless Manitobans vote for increases through referendum (under present legislated limits that, of course, could be repealed). This unlikely to happen, and it makes the prospect of progressive taxation near impossible.

At a time when it is clear to many that the free-market has failed to deliver the goods, there is a need to rethink in more creative and profound alternatives not only to neoliberalism but also to the simple re-adoption of Keynesian economic policies. An anti-poverty campaign that fails to offer a systematic critique of capitalism, which the Target Poverty campaign lacked, begins with false pretences and offers false promises. The Target Poverty campaign called for an increase in public housing, universal childcare, funding to post-secondary institutions, employment opportunities, services for immigrants, reforms to employment insurance, etc. A liberal reading of poverty targets these areas without considering their relation to the rest of economic and social life. In other words, this is treating the symptoms instead of the cause. While most would acknowledge that reforms are needed in most of these departments, instituting reforms that affects all these areas in real terms would be a direct challenge to the structure of capitalism. Herein lies the first mistake of the campaign: That capitalism will allow all these reforms. Unemployment and poverty, instability and glaring corporate corruption are elements of capitalism that cannot be undone by mere reforms. The logic of constant growth and profit accumulation will erect barriers to these reforms at every possible opportunity. This can be seen vividly in current economic policy in Canada and Manitoba: we are bailing out the banks and other financial institutions while cutting welfare and calling for austerity. Being realistic about an anti-poverty strategy means you need to be realistic about what class-forces shape government policy, and Manitoba NDP governments have done nothing to offset the power of capital as a dominant class force.

THE CFS STUDENT-ANTI-POVERTY PROTESTS

The decision by CFS to go beyond its immediate constituency and embrace demands affecting millions of Canadians facing poverty is crucial. It comes at a time when governments are imposing the burden of the economic crisis of capitalism on workers and the poor. As Ontario Coalition Against Poverty organizer John Clarke warned:

“November 5 will fall sadly short if it appeals to the supposed conscience of the Government instead of calling for resistance to those in power. It will not meet its potential if it fails to identify the attacks that are coming down on us as an attempt to stabilize a system in crisis at our expense. More than anything, the day must be about building a movement of serious and effective resistance to these same attacks.”

The CFS-led Day of Action was a valuable step in mobilizing new constituencies to combat poverty in Manitoba. In considering issues of youth and class – and the intersections of racism, sexism, xenophobia, low wages and student debt – the campaign actively opposed the liberal consensus of removing poverty from its structural context. Young people make up a disproportionate percentage of workers in the low-skilled, low-paid service sector, and have born the brunt of flexible working practices and a decline in real wages. Promoting solidarity amongst

youth, workers, immigrants and aboriginal people affected by government cutbacks and neoliberal policy is far more valuable in building a fighting political movement than promising government will take action. Building a genuine alliance outside NDP party parameters to both develop policy and demand changes should be an ongoing campaign by progressive groups in Manitoba. Building these linkages will further the goal of creating a progressive movement that offers an alternative to the impotency of the third-way social democracy represented by the NDP, and its failure to break from neoliberal policy orientation, not to speak of addressing any of the structural inequalities of capitalism.

An independent, progressive movement outside the NDP would be invaluable in confronting the continued assault on public services throughout Manitoba. The privatization of Winnipeg’s waste-water facility and the subsequent increase in water rates was confronted by labour and community groups without much public support or debate. The agenda at City Hall has been dominated by the pro-business cronyism of Mayor Sam Katz and his attempts to do away with the municipal business tax. This has entailed an increase in the number of public-private partnerships and lay-offs of municipal workers to make up for the budget shortfall. City hall continues to prioritize ventures like a new football stadium and downtown water park rather than confront grinding poverty amongst aboriginal and newcomer groups that demand action from multiple levels of government. Building a militant alliance of workers, students and activists ready to confront issues like these, a class analysis and subsequent action, will not only push the NDP to better policies, it will demonstrate what their years of neglect has bred.

The decline in Left opposition in Manitoba, at both the city and provincial levels, and the continued assault on workers’ rights and poor people, must be considered in a wider global context. Despite the value of current socialist theory in analyzing the scope of capitalist crisis, there remains a gulf between this work and the work needed to build and imagine a better world. As much as anything else, the NDP in Manitoba has fostered a political climate of complacency, political retreat and a marginalization of participatory democracy. The narrowing of social vision and political ambitions has impacted the Manitoba labour movement and social movements.

This is the challenge for the Left to both re-imagine and reinvent anti-capitalist theory and organizing. It is time for those working for genuinely progressive change in Manitoba to shake off the false consciousness – to use an older but still valuable term – encouraged by the NDP government. The new leadership of Premier Selinger will only give more evidence of the drift of the NDP toward managing the worst features of neoliberal capitalism, while doing next to nothing to develop the democratic capacities and popular forces to oppose it. The November 5th demonstrations in Winnipeg did its part to help put the formation of an anti-capitalist movement on the social agenda. **R**

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Lessons Learned: Assessing the 2009 City of Toronto Strike

Julia Barnett & Carlo Fanelli

When word came that the 39-day strike by CUPE Locals 79 and 416 had come to an end, the immediate question on most members' minds was "Did we win?" The information gap between rank and file members and the union executive was so large that many strikers were unaware of why exactly they were on strike in the first place and were dependent on media reports to find out where both sides stood during collective bargaining. Much of the information that picketing workers did receive was inconsistent, late or completely empty of any substantive information, leaving strikers frustrated and angry.

Post-strike assessments are never as simple as "did we win or lose?" In this article we offer our interpretation of the strike and the lessons learned from a tumultuous summer when thousands of municipal workers walked picket lines in Toronto. As members of Local 79, we focus on our local. We will not discuss the broad background to the strike that has been written about by others: neoliberal urbanism, City Council's efforts to reduce social services and seek concessions from its unionized and non-unionized workers and its renewed interest in privatizing city assets, contracting out, increasing the number of public-private partnerships and shifting away from commercial property taxes to consumption-based levies (see articles by Greg Albo and Herman Rosenfeld and by Carlo Fanelli in *The Bullet*).

THE UNIONS

CUPE Local 79, the largest public-sector union local in the country, represents over 18 000 workers including public health nurses and educators, health inspectors, child care workers, recreation staff, by-law enforcement officers, building inspectors, court service workers and social services administrators. Some of its members are deemed "essential" and did not strike. Approximately 70% of Local 79's members are women. Some 50% are members of racialized groups. At least half are employed in part-time, seasonal and contingent forms of employment, with inconsistent hours and without the supplemental health benefits enjoyed by full-time employees. The 6000 members of Local 416 mostly work in road maintenance, water treatment, parks, cleaning, animal services and waste collection.

Many on the left praised the locals' bravery for standing up for workers' rights and fighting concessions. However, much less has been written on the shortcomings of both Locals' strategies and tactics and their leading officers' lack of transparency with members.

After the 2002 strike by City of Toronto workers was ended with back-to-work legislation (see the interview with Julia Barnett

and Claudia White in *New Socialist* 37, online at newsocialist.org), activist union members raised the need to be prepared well in advance of a possible strike in terms of planning, coordination, and mobilization and to try to develop new strategies. Some members were openly critical of Local 79's leadership. Others were more hesitant for fear of weakening solidarity or out of the hope that they could change the leadership's policy from within. However, in the years since the 2002 strike there were no sustained efforts to regenerate union involvement or to democratize the union and prepare for a future strike.

STUMBLING INTO A STRIKE

Fast-forward to 2009. Both local leaderships entered into bargaining with the understanding that the City would be attacking the controversial Sick Leave Benefit Program (SLBP), trying to weaken job security provisions, attack seniority rights, limit transfers and promotion, impose a freeze on cost-of-living increases to wages, implement two-tier wage schemes and increase managerial control over the work day. Mayor Miller and his minions argued that "The world has changed" and the City needed to cut back on its costs. This, of course, did not stop Miller and co. from settling with unionized workers in public transit, police, fire, parking authority and housing services.

In spite of bargaining for six months without a contract, Local 79's executive gave little indication of how far apart the two sides were or what employer demands for concessions were on the table. With only hours remaining before both unions went on strike, the Local 79 executive refused to put together the best possible strike coordinating team. CUPE not only failed to engage its members but, aside from a few ill-advised radio ads, did not engage other workers in Toronto with any educational campaigns. No connection was made between communities and public-sector jobs and services or why it is important to support workers defending decent employment conditions and wages.

Local 79 President Ann Dembinski was confident that Mayor Miller would come through for the public-sector unions that had backed his election campaigns and that a fair contract without any concessions would be reached. Much to the dismay of the union brass, management did not budge and both locals found themselves walking the line.

When Locals 79 and 416 officially went on strike many workers showed up to work only to find that they had been locked-out by the employer. Many of the 24 000 striking workers simply did not know where to go or what to do. Picketing sites were unknown, where and how to register for picket duties was unspeci-

fied except on the web site, picket captains had not been trained beforehand and there were few informational materials for members.

ON STRIKE

Local 79 was unprepared in crucial ways. There was a lack of experienced organizers leading the strike. The local president had never been an organizer of a Local 79 strike nor had most of the current members of the executive. The union did not book activists off as full-time organizers far enough in advance. Financial and other resources were allocated in ineffective and inequitable ways across the city. Members with disabilities or health concerns were not adequately provided with modified strike duties. Even though Toronto is a very expensive city to live in, as the strike went on no hardship fund was set up. Strike pay coordination was initiated only after the strike had already begun. Meanwhile the Local 79 bargaining committee acted in almost complete isolation from the membership.

Picketers were essentially left to fend for themselves, strike offices were disorganized and many members experienced a lack of solidarity, resentment and marginalization. There were, of course, exceptions. Many experienced activists with a commitment to the membership and a strong sense of social justice did great work. On some lines a real sense of union solidarity was created and nurtured on some picket lines where workers united and the class antagonism between workers and the employer became clear.

During the strike members of many other union locals as well as community activists showed their solidarity with striking city workers in the form of strike support barbecues, media releases and public rallies. Unfortunately, though, the weakening, disorganization and ineffectiveness of the Canadian Labour Congress, the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Toronto and York Region Labour Council became apparent as the strike went on. This was evident in the lack of concerted mobilization efforts, little to no media time for pro-strike voices and an inability to link Toronto strikers' struggles with the broader social justice movement. The left outside and inside Toronto's unions was unable to mobilize in an effective way around the strike.

In contrast, right-wing critics had a field day blaming so-called "selfish" unionized workers. They pointed to the garbage piling up as well as Mayor Miller's hesitation to go for the throats of striking city workers (even though he encouraged workers to cross the picket line). It didn't take much to see that the campaign to win over public support was won hands-down by the right. Conservative organs such as the *National Post*, *Globe & Mail*, *Toronto Sun*, CTV and Global TV lined up against the strike. The allegedly liberal *Toronto Star*, CP24 and even some community newspapers did too, to a slightly lesser extent.

THE MAYOR, COUNCIL AND THE OUTCOME

The hypocrisy and untrustworthiness of Mayor Miller, accompanied by the silence of "progressive" councilors at City Hall, is worth a brief discussion. The mayor attempted to pit striking

City workers against workers in the most poverty-stricken and destitute living situations by arguing that "due to the economic downturn and rising welfare caseloads the City can't sustain workers' wages." Not once did the mayor target the structural reasons why the City was having financial problems, including two decades of federal and provincial governments offloading services and responsibilities onto municipalities without providing matching fiscal support, Council's redistributive shifting of taxation from higher-income earners to lower- and medium-income earners, Council's generous tax breaks, subsidies and under-valued land-assessments for multi-million dollar developers, future infrastructure costs rising well into the tens of billions, rising poverty, inequality, homelessness, the lack of affordable housing and unemployment in the city. Instead, the mayor, Council, business sectors and right-wing populists used the gutless excuse of the recession to justify their attacks on City workers. They blamed the City of Toronto's workers for a crisis they played no part in creating.

After the strike, both left-wing and right-wing commentators proclaimed Locals 416 and 79 victorious, for very different reasons. But more unpacking and analysis is needed.

The unions' bargaining platform was simple: equality with the settlements recently reached by other unionized workers at the City of Toronto and no concessions. Economically, the unions managed to fight off major concession demands to freeze wages, institute a multiple-tiered wage system, limit seniority-based promotion and replace the banking of sick days and cash-payouts under the SLBP with a short-term disability (STD) plan now called the Illness and Injury Plan (IIP).

Under the deal to end the strike, current workers are able to cash-out their accumulated sick-bank and switch to the IIP plan or keep their existing SLBP. The SLBP is not available to new hires.

After going nearly a decade without wage increases throughout the 1990s, Locals 79 and 416 were successful in gaining 2% raises over 3 years, still below what other City of Toronto unions



received and below City Council's own 2.4% pay increase (not to mention their retention of their own "merit" bonuses and severance packages). The other concessions were taken off the table. With this settlement, the Local 79 part-timers still do not have a sick plan.

When members asked Local 79 President Ann Dembinski on numerous occasions what was wrong with a STD plan – such as the one that members of Local 79 who were formerly employed by the City of York before the amalgamation of Toronto municipalities in 1998 still have – she dismissed and ignored the question. During the strike the fabled SLBP got the bulk of attention from the media (along with the piles of trash). The hard-line union posture that "we do not make any concessions" frustrated many who thought that fighting for the best possible STD plan would have been a better idea than simply defending the existing SLBP that allows workers to bank sick days.

The SLBP had long been used by management as a way to limit wage and benefit increases. It also encourages workers to show up to work unwell so that they can cash-out unused sick days at a later point in time. But any critique of this by members was interpreted as breaking Local 79's age-old rule of blind obedience and devotion to the union executive.

While the economic gains of the strike may be interpreted as a success for City workers, the strike was a political failure when it came to mobilizing sustained action and education, garnering public support as well as linking the defence of unionized jobs with fighting for workers in non-unionized jobs, the underemployed and the unemployed. If any argument should have been made during the City of Toronto strike, it should have been based on better and greener jobs for all. Illusions about the strike being a victory only serve to politically disarm workers in the face of the ruling class's preparation for a fresh offensive, paving the way for further defeats.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? STRATEGY AND VISION

Using the economic recession as a justification, battered cities throughout Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere have already resorted to massive layoffs, cuts in services, selling off assets and imposing periods of unpaid time off. It likely won't be long until that process is intensified in Toronto. During the strike there was no voice speaking up for the waged and unwaged working class.

This demonstrates the need for an organized and structured Left outside City Hall and independent from it. The shortcomings and limitations of the dispersed, localized and isolated Left in Toronto points to the need to break down sectarian barriers and think creatively about novel ways of reaching younger people and building a solid base.

The challenge for union and social justice activists is not to interpret the current attacks against workers or the current short-term fiscal liabilities of cities as a temporary problem, but as part and parcel of the day-to-day operations of capitalism. The ex-

ploitation of the current economic crisis by big business, finance and governments is a conscious strategy that aims to make long-term gains for capital in its control over labour and to continue to tip the balance of power toward capital.

Ruling classes are currently setting the agenda for the "re-regulation" of the economy as well as the reconstitution and reconsolidation of ruling-class power while the passivity and submissiveness of the working classes reaches epic proportions. It wasn't too long ago that workers were up in arms protesting the exorbitant bailouts of billion-dollar companies with public funds, thereby aggravating balance of payments deficits and restarting the speculative fervor of financial markets. The dynamism of neoliberalism is demonstrated by the fact that social democrats – including the "progressive" coalition at Toronto City Hall – were absorbed and incorporated into the neoliberal project. Neoliberalism is not dead and it is certainly not gone.

Unfortunately, decades of bureaucratic unionism and the decline of the left have pacified much of the rank and file membership of the unions. The low level of support for unionized workers' struggles suggests that most workers have become used to lowered expectations. Union rank and file members must come to expect more from their organizations and those who hold union office. However, this shouldn't simply be about higher expectations but new and different expectations – in other words, expectations that go beyond those of the past.

With this in mind, in CUPE 79 we are in the midst of once again attempting to build a reform caucus within that will attempt to democratize our local by calling for and organizing workplace meetings, demanding transparency from the official leadership and engaging in democratic decision making, relevant campaigns, and open political debate. We encourage other unionists to do the same.

Looking ahead, if unions are to reappear as a movement and not simply hang on as a relic of the past, they need to move beyond simply the interests of members in the workplace and really begin thinking about new strategies and tactics to build a broader working class movement across the many divisions among workers including those rooted in racism, sexism, heterosexism and the oppression of people with disabilities.

In other words, there needs to be a move away from corporate unionism toward social movement unionism infused with a deep critical analysis of capitalism. More people need to understand that as long as our lives are left to the devices of markets, competition and profits, a society supportive of solidarity and equality will remain an intangible reality. To achieve such a society, we need democratic social planning to meet collective needs and wants. **R**

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This article is also appearing in the current issue of *New Socialist*.

ON THE REVIVAL OF THE WORKING CLASS AS A SOCIAL FORCE

Sam Gindin

The following talk served as an introduction to a presentation by Steve Williams, the Co-Director of the San Francisco Bay Area group POWER (People Organized to Win Employment Rights). We invited Steve to Toronto because the kind of organizing POWER is doing contributes to a broader sense of who the working class is, and a deeper conception of building class capacities. Organizations like POWER, Migrante, and Worker Action Centres such as those in Toronto, Montreal and Windsor, don't replace traditional unions but they supplement them in ways crucial to any revival of the labour movement. And such a revival is fundamental to sustaining any larger social movement because of the potential contributions of the labour movement's resources, organizational skills and ability to not just protest but also stop the economy in its tracks. [William's dynamic presentation can be viewed at: www.socialistproject.ca/leftstreamed/ls24.php]

PRIVILEGING 'CLASS'?

Before Steve speaks to the experience and lessons in organizing marginalized workers, I'd like to speak briefly to this intimately related issue of the revival of the working class as a social force. A good many social activists are hesitant to identify with the 'working class,' conflating that with bureaucratized unions that emerged to represent male and primarily white breadwinners in the blue-collar industries. There's also a suspicion of the broader term 'class,' seeing it as taking away from, or subordinating, other oppressions and identities.

There is clearly something to the point that unions, in the public as well as private sector, have been too slow to move beyond a leadership style and organizing culture that wasn't sufficiently sensitive to changes in the workforce. This had added barriers to progressive internal practices and to outreach potentials.

Yet it is also true that the majority of union members are now women, and that unions have represented a central site for struggles – and victories – by socialists, women and workers of colour. Moreover, when American autoworkers are laid off in such massive numbers, this includes black UAW members whose share of auto jobs is significantly higher than their share of the workforce. When the Toronto Steelworkers recently brought some 75 shop stewards together to discuss green jobs as well as factory occupations in Argentina, two points quickly struck home. They too were hardly privileged having all been victims of plant closures in the GTA. And, reflecting the changing makeup of both union and non-union industrial workers in the city, 80% were people of colour. The implicit notion of 'privilege' in describing unionized workers is rather inapt in light of what is happening to workers across the board today.

As for the term 'class,' here too there has been some justification in activists being wary of crude attempts to reduce all oppressions to that of class. The point however of emphasizing 'class' is to get at a shared social relationship within capitalism that cuts across and potentially bridges other oppressions. It includes all those who do not have the capital to generate a living: not only those who are (at least for the present) employed, but also those already out of work or denied a chance to work, those who work part-time and those who can't work at all because they have young children or because a disability makes their skills 'uncompetitive' in a profit-driven world.

The working class encompasses all these people and their families, and it does so without ever being able to end differences along race and gender lines. The idea of a homogenous working class was, in any case, always an abstraction. What we call the working class is inherently diverse and it is constantly in flux in terms of how it sees itself and how it relates to others within the class. The challenge hasn't been to erase that diversity (which includes histories and experiences that can be translated into strengths), or to patiently wait for its components to merge into a cohesive class, but how to *actively* build the fragments, divisions and uncertainties into an effective social force – how to *make* a self-conscious working class.

BRINGING CLASS BACK IN

The problem in the unionized labour movement has in fact not been its over-emphasis on class, but the *absence* of a broad and committed class perspective. The fair criticism of unions isn't that they have achieved a degree of security and material comfort for their members (that is something they can justly be proud of) nor even that they haven't paid a lot of attention to diversity issues in recent decades (they have), but their inability to organize more and more workers and to do so in a way that goes beyond a narrow representation of the particular interests of each group of workers in relation to their specific employers. What they have not been able to do in other words is represent the class as a whole in the broad sense raised above. This has contributed to the isolation of unions and therefore their vulnerability to losing past gains.

Just how much a broad understanding of class matters can be seen in the nitty-gritty activity of bringing workers into unions. Unionization has, because of a combination of changes in the economy and corporate aggressiveness, become very difficult. It is when that organizing comes to be seen as being about more than adding new dues and defending existing unionized members and is understood to be part of building the working class and building working class power, that unions are more likely to

generate the energy, resources, commitment, and creativity to be successful – and to bring workers into unions that really matter.

A commonly cited example of the parochialism of the union movement has been its demand to protect local jobs against competition from abroad, with its tendency to nationalism and xenophobia. But an important distinction must be made. When workers were in struggle and articulated these claims as attempts to force corporations to maintain commitments to the community, as a fight over corporate freedoms undermining worker and community freedoms – that is, in class terms – the struggle was much less likely to end up attacking Mexican or Asian workers. It is when there is no class perspective, when unions are identifying with ‘their’ corporation and mobilizing to win subsidies *for* corporations, when the enemy isn’t capital but other workers, that racist tendencies are more likely to be reinforced.

While it is absolutely imperative that unions commit to fighting for the greatest equality amongst all workers if solidarity is to be meaningful, the fact is that equality even just within the working class can’t be achieved in a society based on markets, profits and competition. That is why extending that commitment to fight for overcoming class inequality in general is necessary. Equality within the class is best advanced through being serious about building the unity to bring down the whole class system that orders society.

Along similar lines, it is crucial to expand the emphasis on class into all aspects of our lives and not just the work relationship. Once we see class penetrating everyday life, we can start seeing social movements not as ‘others’ but as reflecting various dimensions of workers’ lives and various sites of struggle given the wide range of problems that confront the whole working class: issues of migrants being brought here to work while being denied the status of full citizens; issues of mistreatment by the state and capital along class lines that so often take shape in racial or gendered form; issues of health care, education and child care; of unemployment insurance, welfare and pensions; issues of housing and the environment.

Let me elaborate on the environmental issue because it is so often presented as a universal human problem that seems to trump social divisions. Absent a perspective that is conscious of relations of power and class divisions, the response to the environmental crisis tends to the application of market-based solutions (inspired by, of all things, innovations in financial markets) that will increase inequality while not in fact representing any possibility of solving the problem. No less important, it opens the door to an ‘environmental-industrial complex’ – private-public partnerships that see the environment as a new cite of both profits and legitimacy.

The point is that the environmental crisis is inseparable from the structures and power relations of capitalism, and also inseparable from the most basic questions of social justice here and abroad. Unless we pose it in the class terms of democratic planning, who pays and who benefits, and what kind of society we want, we’re not engaged in addressing the real problem.

FROM CLASS TO ORGANIZATION

As we think about class and overcoming class oppression in these broader terms, it becomes clear that we can’t avoid posing the issue of an independent vision – independent that is, from the logic of capitalism. Without such a vision, ‘class’ itself can’t provide much coherence. Yet even a class perspective and vision are not enough. They must have an organizational expression. This is true in the sense of both reviving the role of unions, and in going moving beyond them.

The revival of unions will have to draw on the many examples of how working class people have engaged in effective movement building and struggles outside the unions. Bringing this experience into unions will largely be a matter of a movement from below within the unions. But we should have no illusions about rank-and-file members transforming their workplaces and locals one-by-one. Isolated as they are even from fellow union members doing similar work elsewhere and with limited resources to challenge the power structures within their unions, this – as many activists are frustratingly rediscovering today – makes such a local-by-local strategy seem overwhelming. This points to the need for organizational innovations to link and support networks of workers across their workplaces and across the groups that also struggle to define and represent broad working class interests and needs in their communities.

But there is also an inherent limitation to unions as working class organizations. Even at their best, there is only so far unions can go beyond representing a particular group of workers. Though they can be pushed, both internally and by examples from the outside, to think and act in broader class terms, their organizational form – negotiating contracts for specific workers – limits how far they can go. They are structured, as a South African trade unionist put it, to represent *workers*, not the working *class* (cited in Bill Fletcher Jr, *Solidarity Divided*). This was always a problem, but its been reinforced by neoliberalism and the further fragmentation of work and community – a fragmentation, it is important to note, that is also a problem for social movements because of their concentration on single issues or a particular constituency.

The issue, therefore, of both reviving unions and going beyond them requires developing other kinds of organizations that have their feet in the workplace and in the community, that cross individual unions and social movements, that create new spaces of struggle, develop new individual and collective capacities and spread new hope and possibilities.

BEYOND ALLIANCES

It also means that we need to think beyond our task being the formation of new alliances between the movements and trade unions. This too is of course a step forward, but it does not get at the transformations that need to occur within both the social movements and organized labour – changes that can only come through some larger, more encompassing vehicles of class organization which are engaged in broader class formation.

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San Francisco's Black Exodus

Jamilah King

It's been 33 years, but Ed Donaldson can still see the anxious look on his mother's face when she was told she had to move. It was 1976, and Donaldson was only 10 – the youngest of three children – when the family received word from the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency that they were being kicked out of their Hunter's Point apartment. Donaldson's mother decided to use the opportunity to purchase a home – no easy feat for a single Black woman in the 1970s. After months of racist- and sexist-tinged questioning by loan officials (was she having more children? where was her husband?), she secured a loan for a house she still lives in today.

"We landed on our feet, but so many other families didn't," remembered Donaldson, now 43 and the Housing Counseling Director at the San Francisco Housing Development Corporation (HDC), an organization focused on finding affordable homes in San Francisco for people of color, particularly Blacks.

As in other cities across the country, San Francisco's Black communities became the focus of massive urban renewal programs spanning from the late 1940s through the 1970s. In the city's predominantly Black Fillmore district, a total of 4,729 businesses, 2,500 households and 883 Victorian homes were demolished to make room for government-owned housing and commercial businesses. Some displaced residents moved to other parts of San Francisco, while others relocated to more affordable cities like Oakland and East Palo Alto. In total, more than 5,000 families were displaced.

Ironically, since the end of the urban renewal programs in the '70s, San Francisco city officials have commissioned several studies investigating why Black residents are leaving and how to get them back. Recommendations in the past have included training young Black entrepreneurs and establishing a Black tourist district like Chinatown. Yet the hemorrhaging has continued.

Since the last report in 1990, San Francisco's Black population has dropped by 40 percent, faster than any other major city in the country. According to the latest Census data, Black residents make up only 6.9 percent of the city's current population and are projected to make up as little as 4.6 percent in 2050.

The latest government effort to reverse this loss is the African American Out-Migration Task Force started by Mayor Gavin Newsom and Supervisor Sophie Maxwell in 2007. The task force has 18 members – mostly clergy, researchers and city officials – and was supposed to investigate what was driving Black residents out of the city. They were also to come up with a set of comprehensive policy recommendations to bring them back. Yet after nearly two years of work, the recommendations remain unpublished. But some task force members are concerned that the mayor will want final recommendations closely aligned with his already controversial housing agenda.

Last year both Mayor Newsom and Supervisor Maxwell endorsed Proposition G, a controversial housing measure that allows Florida-based developer Lennar Corporation to develop 10,000 new homes in Bayview. The measure, which ultimately passed was hotly debated because Bayview is a historically Black San Francisco neighborhood. It grew from fewer than 20,000 residents in 1940 to almost 150,000 by 1950 – the vast majority of whom were Black migrants from the South who came to work in the nearby U.S. Navy shipyard, along with many Black veterans returning from war. At the time, Black residents were prevented from living in other parts of the city by both legal and illegal policies and practices.

Still, some task force members are optimistic. Regina Davis, President/CEO of the San Francisco Housing Development Coalition, pointed to research collected by San Francisco State University professor Shawn Ginwright showing that 50 percent of Black residents who have left San Francisco since 1990 have moved to Oakland.

Davis thinks those residents are more likely to return if more is done to publicize what the city is doing, such as the \$100,000 in down payment assistance offered for first-time homebuyers through the Mayor's Office of Housing. This measure was highlighted in a draft version of the report as a potential way to bring middle class Black residents back. But in a city where it takes an estimated \$77,000 for a family of four to survive, housing is just one issue driving and keeping Black residents out of the city.

Tinisch Hollins, a member of the task force, said that the real intent should be to transition the city's current population to homeownership instead of emphasizing sub-standard public housing, and argues that assistance with down payments isn't enough in a city where an average home costs close to \$1-million. Moreover, she said the issue is much larger than housing.

COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS SHARE THAT SKEPTICISM

"'Out-migration' is this broad, neutral term that assumes that Black people are leaving of their own free will and have found greener pastures," said Alicia Garza, co-director of People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER), a multiracial non-profit that works on housing and wage rights in San Francisco. "Some of that is true, but what it doesn't do is take a critical look at... what San Francisco is doing that's causing that hemorrhaging."

Preliminary research by the task force showed that one key reason Black residents have continued leaving is "cultural safety," meaning the level of racial hostility targeted toward Black communities. That same research showed that some former residents said they felt alienated by what they see as the city's erasure of

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Black history. The city's Fillmore district, for instance, is now promoted as a jazz district, but with no direct mention that it was a historically Black neighborhood. Many younger Black residents feel that any institutional change must be community-led.

And that change in leadership may be in the Osiris Coalition, a collective of mostly young, Black leaders and five community-based organizations. The first piece of legislation the coalition tackled was the city's long-dormant Certificate of Preference program. Established in 1967, the program was supposed to benefit residents like Donaldson's family – people who were displaced by urban renewal. But for years, the program was plagued by inefficiency and mismanagement. It required that families provide paperwork to prove they had lived in areas that were demolished.

In its first two years, the coalition has been successful in pushing several reforms to the program, including getting the city to hire two staff members who work directly with residents applying for certificates and to institute an online database and registration form. About 6,500 certificates have been issued since the program's inception, and a little over 1,000 have been exercised.

In 1999, the program was extended to include the children of those displaced families and now the group is working to include the grandchildren of displaced residents in the program. Numbers on exactly how many residents have benefited from the changes were not immediately available, but Donaldson hopes a more efficient process will entice greater numbers of people to apply. An estimated 96,000 people are projected to be eligible for certificates.

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The cost of not having such organizations – of avoiding the building of such organizations – was never more evident than during the recent crisis. Capitalism was in disarray, in the midst of its greatest crisis since the 1930s, and a major section of the elite was discredited. Yet in spite of sporadic and localized battles here and there, we never even gave them a real scare. We were frustratingly unable to take advantage of that historic moment. Our capacities didn't match what we are up against.

Because unions and the social movements were not capable of forming, representing, and expressing the broadest class interests, we now face an even more dangerous situation. Capitalism seems to have not only survived the chaos it created, but – at least if the German election and the fate of U.S. universal health care initiatives are indicative – seems to be emerging more powerful. Some banks have disappeared but others have absorbed them and banking is more concentrated. And the American imperial state remains at the centre of the making and managing of global capitalism. In this context, it's not hard to guess who will face the pressures to pay for fixing this crisis, and with our weakness so exposed there is good reason to worry about how far the right will now go in trying to exploit the opportunity we missed. The crisis that should have been on the right has turned into one on the left.

Finally, there is one aspect of capitalist crises that we espe-

POWER builds the power of working class African Americans and Latinas in San Francisco to make change in our communities and to build a vibrant movement for economic, environmental, racial and gender justice.

In many ways, the Osiris Coalition stands as a challenge to an older generation of Black leadership that was either complicit in or ineffective to Black residents being pushed out of the city, according to Donaldson. And while he took issue with the fact that the program places the burden to return on displaced families, he also said that the work itself has given the Osiris Coalition the credibility it needs to be taken seriously. "What we're saying is that those old folks who are there, who are comfortable with doing things how they've done in the past, we're not standing for it," he said. **R**

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cially need to come to grips with. If we are going to build a movement that challenges capitalism, we are going to have to convince people that capitalism has become a barrier to human development *even when it seems to be working 'well.'* Otherwise crises tend to romanticize the pre-crisis period and that leaves many people vulnerable to the limited goal of fixing the crisis so we can get back to how things were. How tragic it would be for our movements if this crisis led only to a further lowering of expectations and narrowing of possibilities rather than bringing new openings for radically more ambitious goals.

What is so exciting about the work of POWER is that it has come to ask the big questions through its very concrete work on the ground. It has linked its vision of an alternative society to a practice of organizing from below and democratizing knowledge so the formerly marginalized can themselves become organizers and leaders. Take a look at the remarkable book on Land, Class and Power this organization has produced alongside its nitty-gritty grass roots working class community struggles. There is a common notion on the left everywhere that Canada is further along the road to progressive change than the U.S. is, but I think POWER shows us we have a lot to learn from what is happening on the left in the United States. **R**

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People's Republic of China at 60: Socialist Revolution, Capitalist Restoration

Chris Slee

October 1, 2009 marked 60 years since Mao Zedong proclaimed the creation of the People's Republic of China. This followed the victory of the People's Liberation Army, led by the Communist Party of China (CCP), over the U.S.-backed Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party, KMT).

In 1921, when the CCP was founded, China was in chaos. Western intervention – military, economic, political and cultural – had destroyed or undermined traditional Chinese institutions. New, stable institutions had not been created. Various imperialist powers grabbed pieces of Chinese territory.

Some modern industry was established, mainly in the coastal cities. But most Chinese people were peasants, heavily exploited by big landowners.

The CCP, which had won support among urban workers, was ruthlessly crushed by the KMT in 1927, with thousands of communists massacred. The CCP survived in remote rural areas, and grew again with peasant support. In these areas, it carried out progressive measures, such as land reform.

Following the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s, the CCP won respect as the most determined anti-Japanese fighters. After the defeat of Japan in 1945, war broke out again between the CCP and the pro-capitalist KMT, with the Communists winning.

SOCIAL GAINS

The early years of the revolution brought big social gains for the impoverished population. Health and education were greatly improved. Mass campaigns eliminated disease, illiteracy, prostitution, forced marriage and many other abuses of the old society.

Before the revolution, a large section of people lived on the brink of starvation. This lowered resistance to disease so that epidemics killed thousands every year. There were no reliable statistics, but it has been estimated that China's life expectancy before 1949 was 35 years. By 1981, life expectancy had risen to 69.6 years for women and 67 for men, Ruth and Victor Sidel's 1982 book, *The Health of China*, said.

Huge campaigns of vaccination and health education, medical training and increased health services largely wiped out many previously rampant diseases. Medical services were brought to rural areas that had not previously seen a doctor.

Urban workers also benefited. In addition to the health and

literacy programs, they gained job security and other benefits, such as housing supplied by their workplace.

The CCP took some initial steps in the transition toward socialism. It mobilised the working class to weaken the power of the capitalists. It nationalised capitalist industry and began building a planned economy. However, the transition to socialism was hindered both by objective conditions (the backwardness of China, the pressures of imperialism, etc.) and by the bureaucratic nature of the CCP.

BUREAUCRACY AND REPRESSION

The CCP used repression against opponents, including people who supported the revolution but disagreed with some of the government's policies. This intimidated people from criticising mistaken government policies. It meant bad policies were often not corrected until they had become disasters of such a magnitude that the leadership was forced to change course.

This was combined with institutionalised inequality. In 1956, the Chinese government adopted a system of ranks for state employees that included 30 grades. The top grade received 28 times the pay of the bottom grade. In addition to their salaries, higher party and state officials had expense accounts for special housing, cars, drivers, personal servants, meals, travel and other perks. At the top of this system of repression and bureaucratic privilege was Mao Zedong, whose authority was maintained by a cult of personality.

An example of the consequences of these practices was the so-called Great Leap Forward in 1958. It attempted to bring about enormous, and impossible, increases in industrial and agricultural production. The attempt disrupted the economy and caused a period of economic decline – even famine.

There was no open admission of mistakes, nor open criticism of Mao. The cult of Mao was maintained. But the failure of Mao's grandiose schemes sowed the seeds of a split among the CCP central leadership. One faction, headed by Liu Shaochi and Deng Xiaoping, were often referred to as "pragmatists" or "moderates." They wanted no more voluntarist adventures like the Great Leap Forward.

The other faction headed by Mao and including defence minister Lin Biao was still prone to voluntarism. They sometimes used egalitarian rhetoric – hypocritical given the privileged lifestyle of the bureaucracy, of which they were part.

The Maoist faction, in decline after the Great Leap Forward debacle, launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 to make a comeback. They used Mao's prestige to mobilise youth to attack supporters of Liu and Deng – accused of “following the capitalist road.” Mao and his supporters used radical-sounding slogans, like “It's right to rebel” to mobilise students against Mao's opponents. High school and university students formed groups of “rebels” or “red guards.” They criticised, humiliated, and often assaulted teachers and academic authorities. They also attacked party and government officials.

Mao's faction tried to keep control of the movement, directing it against those perceived as Mao's opponents. But some groups escaped control and attacked Mao's supporters too. Some seized arms and different groups of “rebels” began fighting each other. The army was brought in to restore order. Although the Maoist faction appeared to have come out on top in the inner-party struggle, their grip on power was actually very shaky. They had to restore to positions of authority many of the old cadres who had been purged, to get society functioning again. The Cultural Revolution ended in an uneasy compromise.

At this stage, U.S. imperialism started putting out feelers to the Chinese bureaucrats. It was looking for a deal with China at the expense of Vietnam and Third World national liberation struggles generally. The first talks were held in 1969. U.S. secretary of state Henry Kissinger visited China in 1971, preparing the ground for President Richard Nixon's visit the following year. China's foreign policy turned sharply to the right in 1971, with the Chinese government openly supporting right-wing forces in struggles in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Sudan and Angola. It seems most leaders of both the Maoist and anti-Maoist factions agreed on this turn.

RESTORING CAPITALISM

Mao died in 1976 and his supporters were defeated in the ensuing power struggle. By 1978, Deng Xiaoping had become the real leader of China. Deng introduced “market reforms.” In the early stages, the reforms involved the use of market mechanisms to develop the economy, but with the state sector remaining predominant in large-scale industry. But by 1992, the Deng regime had clearly adopted the perspective of restoring capitalism as the dominant mode of production. Corruption spread as bureaucrats increasingly strove to accumulate wealth for themselves as private ownership of the economy expanded.

Opposition to corruption – and the bureaucratic regime – began to grow. In 1988-89 there was an upsurge of demands for freedom and democracy, and against corruption. In April 1989, students protested in Beijing's Tienanmen square. They remained for more than a month and were joined by many non-students. The army was ordered to remove the protesters, but the protesters talked to the soldiers and won many of them over.

Workers joined the protest and raised their own demands, focusing on job security, wages, opposition to the burgeoning private enterprises, and control over their workplaces.

Eventually, the regime brought in new army units that used extreme violence to crush the movement. A wave of repression followed.

CHINA TODAY

In 1992, Deng Xiaoping gave the go-ahead for a policy of all-out privatisation. The state's share of industrial production has fallen from 100% in 1978 to 31.6% in 2004. Today, millions of Chinese workers are ruthlessly exploited by local and foreign capital. Extremely long hours, physical punishment, fines and non-payment of wages are among the abuses suffered by many Chinese workers.

Transnational corporations are attracted to China by the huge reserve army of labour created by the displacement of peasants from the land and workers retrenched from state-owned factories. They are also attracted by the absence of trade unions in many enterprises, and the tameness of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions where it exists. (It sometimes challenges blatant violations of China's labour laws by employers through legal channels, but does not encourage strikes.)

It is clear that China is now a capitalist country. Yet the imperialists are not totally satisfied. State-owned enterprises remain dominant in certain strategic industrial sectors and in the banking sector. The failure of China to fully apply the neoliberal model meant it could use the state-owned banks to quickly implement stimulus measures after the 2008 global financial crisis.

The imperialists want complete privatisation and full access to all areas of the economy. This contributes to the tension between the rulers of China and the United States. It helps explain the hypocritical rhetoric from Western politicians and media about the need for “democracy” in China.

The Chinese regime wants to maintain a certain degree of independence from imperialism. In the past, it has collaborated with imperialism to attack Third World revolutions, even invading Vietnam in 1979. However, at the moment it has good relations with revolutionary governments in Cuba and Venezuela.

The Chinese state remains capitalist. It represses the resistance of the workers to capitalist exploitation. However, workers are fighting back against attacks on their job security, living standards and working conditions. There have been thousands of strikes and protests by Chinese workers, as well as numerous protests by peasants against land seizures by local governments and property developers.

There have been protests by environmentalists against pollution and environmental destruction. These struggles indicate the potential for a new socialist revolution – one that could establish a genuine workers' democracy. **R**

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China's Poor: Always With Us?

Hu Xingdou

The second-generation poor stand in contrast to the second-generation rich. One group inherits their parents' poverty, the other their wealth. Together they demonstrate the hard facts of the rich-poor divide and its permanence – the children of the rich stay rich, and the children of the poor stay poor. And while wealth may often be squandered – fortunes, the Chinese say, never last three generations – poverty persists, with even third and future generations unable to change their fate.

So who is responsible for the vast numbers who inherit poverty? And how to change their fate? In China, the cycle of poverty is due to the failings and irrationalities of a number of systems – of household registration, education, state-owned monopolies, taxation, distribution of resources, welfare, the press, public representation and government bureaucracy.

The household registration (*hukou*) system classifies people according to domicile and rural or urban status, and creates congenital poverty for rural families. Their children will always be classed as rural residents unless:

- they get into university, and the chances of that are extremely slim. The offspring of those who move to work in the cities will not be treated as locals or even Chinese citizens. By leaving their domicile, they lose entitlement to even the limited welfare / services they would get at home, so they very much fall through the cracks.

- their parents buy property or start a business, and the chances of that are again extremely slim. According to one report only four or five of Nanjing's one million migrant workers obtained an urban *hukou* over a five year period – even the lottery offers better odds. The household registration system is the prime cause of prejudice, social immobility and second-generation poverty.

The *hukou* system also gives rise to a divided educational system. Vastly greater spending in urban areas leaves rural children struggling to obtain a good education. Their chances of attending university are slim: According to a report from an academic seminar on the theory and reality of educational equality in China, children from rural households are only one fourth as likely as children of urban workers to be accepted to a key national university, and have less than one thirtieth the chance of children of government and Party officials. Educational inequality passes poverty on through the generations.

Meanwhile, the state monopoly on banking results in guarantee requirements, borrowing costs and a lack of credit rating information that only large firms can overcome. SMEs, individuals and rural residents are left without credit and so many smaller firms collapse, jobs are lost, and individuals cannot start their own businesses. In the U.S. and EU there are numerous smaller

private banks, community credit cooperatives and loan companies lending to ordinary people – but in China a handful of state-owned banks ignore the poor in favour of state monopolies and multinationals. Businesses fail and vulnerable groups are denied the financial assistance they need to achieve a better life.

Ever-stronger state-owned monopolies crowd out private enterprise, which can only survive by offering low wages and benefits. This again harms the interests of urban workers and young migrants to the cities – the inheritors of poverty. China's finances are controlled by government and bureaucrats. Party cadres have the final say on government spending. This leads to huge waste on government wining and dining, official vehicles, travel within China and overseas, and the construction of government buildings – yet public service funding is barely adequate. Meanwhile taxation is levied mainly on businesses and the wages they pay – worsening the plight of small companies and poor families.

The social structure of rich northern countries can be described as bell-shaped – the bulk of the population is middle class, with small groups of the very rich or very poor. In China the picture looks more like a dumbbell – many people are either very rich or very poor. In particular workers and rural residents are vulnerable, with very low annual incomes. Unreasonable distribution of resources directly creates second-generation poverty.

China's welfare system works on three levels, or classes. Cadres and civil servants enjoy the best treatment. Next are urban residents and company employees, many of whom face issues with unemployment or healthcare provision. The third class is rural residents, with medical care and pension provision only just getting started and currently at a very low level. Generational poverty will, I fear, just carry on.

But these are just the secondary causes of second-generation poverty. The most fundamental cause is that vulnerable groups lack the right to speak, to organize and to exercise oversight of government. We lack private publications – local officials control radio, TV and the new media to protect and add to their own interests. The voices of the poor, petitioners, the workers and the rural are not heard. Workers and rural residents lack a truly representative organization. They are therefore unable to negotiate on a level playing field with capital, and so wages and benefits stay low. There are severe restrictions on what farmers can do to market their products, so rural incomes remain low and quality and safety remain in question. Meanwhile, people's representatives and officials who have not been appointed through genuine elections will not of their own accord represent the people's interests. And so poverty will be passed on again and again through a vast and vulnerable population. **R**

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50 Years After:

The Tragedy of China's 'Great Leap Forward'

John Riddell

On October 1, the People's Republic of China will mark the 60th anniversary of its foundation. This will be an occasion to celebrate one of the most influential victories of popular struggle in our era.

This great uprising forged a united and independent Chinese state, freed the country from foreign domination and capitalist rule, ended landlordism, provided broad access to education and health care, and set in motion popular energies that modernized and industrialized its economy. The revolutionary triumph of 1949 laid the foundation for China's present dynamism and influence, as well as providing an enormous impetus to anti-colonial revolution worldwide.

Yet despite these gains, the socialist movement and ideology that headed the revolution, identified with Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong, disappeared from China soon after his death in 1976. The revolution's central leader is still revered, but his doctrines have been set aside. The country's present leadership has promoted private capitalist accumulation, not socialist planning, as China's chief engine of growth. Its policies have aroused much popular protest, but not a revived Maoist movement.

How was revolutionary China diverted onto a capitalist path? This setback has a lengthy prehistory, reaching back to the impact on Chinese Communist Party of policies identified with Joseph Stalin in the late 1920s. But much can be learned by considering the first major setback of the People's Republic, a dark episode that reached its culmination exactly 50 years ago. This was China's 1958-60 "Great Leap Forward" – an ambitious and failed attempt to jump-start rapid industrialization by reshaping China's countryside.

REVOLUTIONARY BREAKTHROUGH

The first years of the People's Republic saw great progress in every sphere:

- the forging of a unified state;
- facing down imperialist reprisals, including by halting the U.S. military in the 1950-53 Korean War;
- surviving isolation and reprisals;
- economic revival; and
- the beginnings of industrialization.

Above all, the Chinese peasantry, the driving force of the revolution, carried out a radical land reform and restored the rural economy. In 1955 almost the entire peasantry pooled its lands in cooperative farms. But as China's first Five-Year Plan for eco-

nomic development drew to a close in 1957, there were signs of disequilibrium, including massive unemployment in the cities and underutilization of labour in the countryside, ills that China's focus on capital-intensive heavy industry had failed to address.

The Communist Party leadership responded with a plan for "simultaneous development" of heavy and light industry, carried out in both urban centres and rural areas, in a crash campaign to mobilize a large portion of the rural workforce in labour-intensive industrial and infrastructural development.

The goals were praiseworthy, but how was this massive new industrial work force to be organized and fed?

'GREAT LEAP'

It was this challenge that inspired the launch of the Great Leap Forward at the beginning of 1958 – a campaign to produce "more, faster, better, and cheaper."

In factories, hours of work were lengthened and production quotas raised. In rural areas, small-scale industrial projects were started up, the most publicized being "backyard blast furnaces" to produce iron and steel. Peasants were mobilized for major irrigation and other land-improvement projects.

Planning was based on projections that food production per hectare could be swiftly increased five to 20 times over, through introduction of large-scale collective farms and the use of new, unproven techniques of cultivation. These projections inspired Mao to declare that "planting one-third [of the land] is enough." So labour could safely be diverted to industrial projects.

As the campaign unfolded, a new social form was invented – the "people's communes" – each of which organized tens of thousands of peasants for collective field labour, industrial work, and land improvement projects. In the course of 1958, several hundred million peasants were enrolled in the communes.

Broadly speaking, the program was modeled on collectivization in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin after 1928, a program that aimed to enable the state to get direct control of peasant production and divert a large part of it to the support of industrialization.

As in the Soviet Union, the results in China were discouraging. National economic planning gave way under the strain. Shortages of raw materials and transportation blockages spread. Some rural industry projects took root, but waste was enormous, and rural steel production proved a costly failure.

Floods and droughts aggravated the crisis. Most ominous of all, agriculture was crippled by the many forms of disruption engendered by the communes, and the grain harvest fell by about 30%. By 1959, the entire country was gripped by hunger, which lasted through 1960. Starvation claimed millions of victims. It took 15 years to bring per-capita grain production back up to pre-Great Leap levels.

FAMINE AND REVOLUTION

It is not unusual for the upheaval of revolution to be accompanied by a crisis of food production.

The young Russian Soviet republic, for example, experienced a severe famine in 1920-21. Its causes were clear: seven years of devastation by war and civil war, which had led to a collapse of urban-rural economic exchange. The Soviet government energetically publicized this tragedy, calling in aid organizations set up by the world workers' movement as well as pro-capitalist agencies such as the American Relief Agency headed by later U.S. president Herbert Hoover.

Within a few months, the Soviets enacted the New Economic Policy (NEP), which restored the peasants' right to trade grain freely; agricultural recovery was swift.

But the course of the Chinese food crisis of 1959-60 had more in common with that in Stalin's Soviet Union during 1932-33, where forced collectivization led to a hidden famine that claimed an estimated 6-8 million victims.

In the Chinese case, the food crisis was shrouded in secrecy. Suspicions of a major Chinese famine seemed outlandish, since abolition of famine had been one of the revolution's proudest achievements. Moreover, the Great Leap began under conditions of peace and rising production. Outside observers were misled by the 50% increase in China's grain exports during the Great Leap years. It was not until after Mao's death, two decades later, that the famine's extent became widely known outside China.

There is today in China no independent movement of workers and peasants who can convey to us their historic memory and assessment of this experience.

In preparing this article, I focused on sources that are sympa-

thetic to the Chinese revolution and its achievements, avoiding those poisoned by anti-Communist bias. But even sympathetic writers report many barriers in reconstructing the course of events. One three-person team says that on their first field trip, a month of intensive interviewing did not get at any of what were later revealed to be the key facts in the history of the village under investigation.

THE GREAT LEAP'S TOLL

In this challenging context, the Great Leap experience has become the focus of raging controversy between Mao's defenders and detractors. Typical is the disagreement over the number of famine deaths.

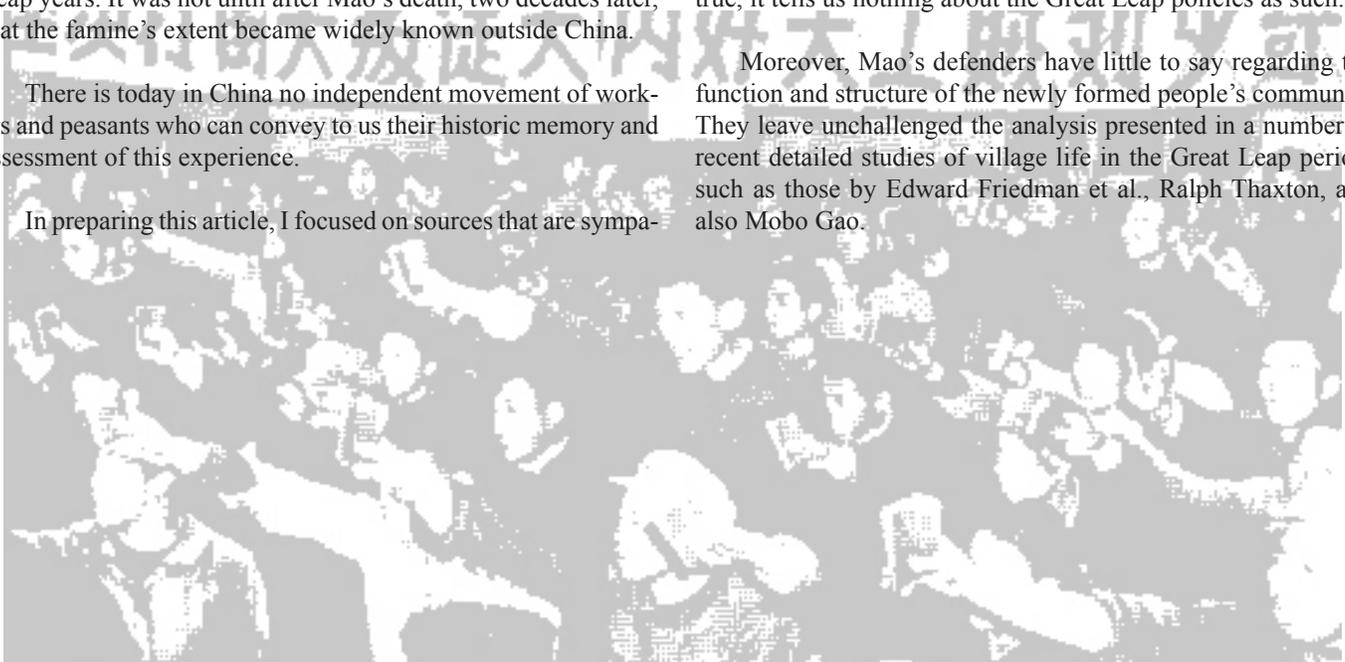
In the early 1980s, the Chinese government released demographic statistics pointing to 15 million famine-related deaths. Writers hostile to the People's Republic claim this is an understatement, offering estimates as high as 38 million.

Mao's supporters say all these estimates are unreliable and biased attempts to besmirch Mao's memory, but even they concede that a serious famine took place and that the death toll was high. Among them, Robert Weil concedes 15 million or more "excess deaths"; Mobo Gao puts the total at 8.3 million; William Hinton estimates a "demographic gap" of more than 13 million, including through a decline in the birth rate. (See "Sources," below.)

As Gao notes, "even the lowest estimate of several million deaths cannot gloss over the disaster." Mao's defenders stress the enduring achievements of the People's Republic's early years, comparing them favourably with the ambiguous record of the recent period. They are on strong ground here.

While conceding the Great Leap's excesses, Mao's defenders argue that he was not personally responsible; other leaders and subordinates, they say, were mainly to blame. Even if that is true, it tells us nothing about the Great Leap policies as such.

Moreover, Mao's defenders have little to say regarding the function and structure of the newly formed people's communes. They leave unchallenged the analysis presented in a number of recent detailed studies of village life in the Great Leap period, such as those by Edward Friedman et al., Ralph Thaxton, and also Mobo Gao.



The Commune's central importance, these studies tell us, lay in transferring the organization of farm labour, the disposal of peasants' production, and the responsibility for feeding rural producers from the peasant family to an administration that was usually located outside the village and was not subject to its control.

So great was the prestige among the peasants of the government – their government – that this change was accepted with little resistance, and promises that it would bring peasant prosperity were greeted with enthusiasm. But the actual outcome was to allocate more food to the cities and to state officials and less to rural producers, depriving them of hard-won food security.

Peasants were forbidden not only from buying or selling grain but also from traditional handicraft sidelines like rope-making. Small plots for family cultivation were abolished. Food was provided by communal kitchens – indeed cooking at home was banned. In some cases, peasant homes were torn down (without compensation) and peasants camped out in tents in the fields. Field work extended to 12 hours a day. Peasants could no longer travel without permission.

Rations in the communal kitchens, generous at first, were progressively reduced to starvation levels. The commune became a trap: peasant families had lost access to traditional recourses to stave off a food emergency.

A massive campaign to collect scrap iron for rural blast furnaces turned into an assault on the rural household: even iron cooking utensils and door hinges were seized and fed to the furnaces, leaving doorways gaping empty in the wind. Tragically, the furnaces produced little that was usable, and most were soon abandoned.

Meanwhile, local officials faced pressure to exaggerate in reports on crop yields. Many of those who insisted on truthful reporting were punished. Aggressive state grain procurement left peasants with less than the minimum needed to assure subsistence.

“The end result of all this,” writes Mobo Gao, “was that the rural residents were left to starve.”

NEW INEQUALITIES

Even in crisis conditions, distribution of food was unequal. The grain ration in 1960-61 was 8 jin/month for peasants, 21 jin for factory workers, and 24 jin for party officials whose need was less because they did not carry out manual labour. (1 jin=500 grams) The state preached equality but in reality provided privileges to those with access to networks of influence and power. Scarce goods were distributed to officials according to rank, through a five-tier supply system.

The principle of equality was also violated by creation of a caste of pariahs in the villages, composed of so-called landlords, rich peasants, and rightists. The landlords and rich peasants des-

ignation was based on landholdings long since swept away by the land reform. Outcast status was passed on to children.

An “anti-rightist” campaign, launched in 1957, targeted above all those who had complained about bureaucratic corruption or abuses. Millions were labelled rightists, in part because of government rewards to localities that placed more than 5% in that category. During the Great Leap, anyone who complained about government policy faced the danger of being hurled down into this stigmatized caste. Hundreds of thousands were sent to labour camps, where they were held for many years.

Reprisals against suspected dissidents included “public criticism,” in which suspects were subjected to verbal and physical abuse as a means of extraction admissions of guilt. Other punishments included withdrawal of food rations, beatings, and, in some cases, killings.

Do such reports represent exceptional cases? It is true that Ralph Thaxton's study concerns a province, Henan, where the regional authorities' extreme application of the Great Leap policies, originally lauded as a model, was later disavowed by the central government. But available sources do not report any trace of open public discussion of Great Leap policies, either nationally or on the commune level. These sources do not report any instances during the Great Leap where peasants successfully overturned an abusive commune or village leadership, even in communes that held back reserves in their granaries during the worst of the famine.

Nor is there evidence of attempts by the central leadership to establish guidelines to protect working people against abuse of power, safeguard dissident voices, or guarantee of the right of working people to join together in advocating alternative policies.

The way the Great Leap ended gives us something of its extremist flavour. In 1961, peasants were granted “three freedoms” – to cultivate a small private plot of land, to cook in private homes, and to engage in petty trade. Other restrictions on peasant activity also eased. Meanwhile, China stopped its multi-million-ton grain exports and began importing grain in similar quantities.

Recovery was rapid. Robert Weil reports that life expectancy in 1962 was double the Great Leap level and higher than before the emergency. Food production picked up as well, although full recovery took many years.

CAPITALIST ROAD

At the height of the Great Leap, in August 1959, Peng Shuzi, a Chinese communist forced into exile a decade earlier for his dissident views, termed the newly formed People's Communes “an effective instrument in the hands of the CCP for exploiting and controlling the peasant.”

Peng believed that this “exploitation” was different from what we experience under capitalism: the intended beneficiary was not

a private capitalist but the national economy from which those in power drew their privileges.

But for the peasantry the coercive transfer of wealth out of the hands of local producers had similarities to landlordism. And despite the egalitarian idealism that was so prominent at the Great Leap's outset, the communes functioned in a manner similar to a capitalist factory – but with no right to form a union or to change jobs. The Great Leap thus prefigured the exploitative system that emerged after Mao's death.

When the Chinese government ultimately pulled back from the most destructive policies of the Great Leap, it did not repudiate the hierarchy, privilege, and disregard for workers' democracy that characterized those years.

The architects of the Great Leap hoped that its arbitrary, coercive, and destructive character would be justified by a jump in production. This, they hoped, would create the preconditions for a truly just society. However, the resulting collapse of production is strong evidence that socialist policies must not destroy but build on worker and peasant culture, wisdom, initiative, and control – what the Venezuelan revolutionists today call “protagonism.”

The setbacks in the Great Leap included not only the tragic famine but also the weakening of the ties between Chinese working people and the new state they had created. It marked a step on the road that led ultimately to the rise of a capitalist system of production in the People's Republic. **R**

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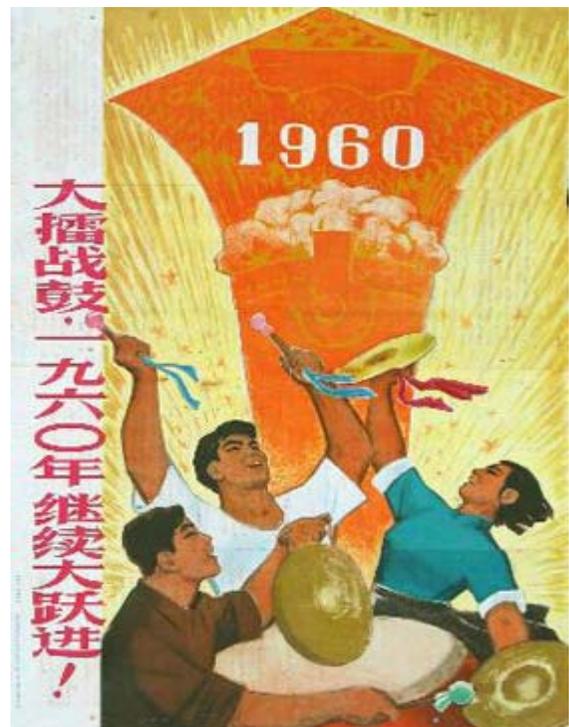
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The MST and the Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in Brazil: 25 Years of Resistance to Neoliberal Rule

Ali Mustafa

Brazil is a country of glaring polarization, at once among the wealthiest (in terms of GDP) and most unequal (by any equivalent measure) in the world. Formally the last country to abolish slavery in 1888, Brazil officially became a republic one year later in 1889 following a long and brutal history of Portuguese colonial rule dating back to the early 1500s whose deep rooted legacy of corruption, clientelism, and impunity still endures to this day. The intense concentration of wealth and land distribution by the *ancien regime* amidst the extreme poverty and social exclusion of the urban and rural poor in Brazil today cannot be understood in isolation, but instead reflect a historical continuum that has seen colonial rule finally overcome only to inherit all of its essential qualities.

Whereas several Latin American countries (including Mexico, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Nicaragua, etc.) have undergone sweeping land reform as a necessary precursor to reducing structural inequality and alleviating widespread social unrest, Brazil by contrast has yet to address in any substantive sense land ownership laws that have ruled the country uninterrupted since the colonial era. Second only to post-apartheid South Africa, Brazil currently has the highest concentration of land ownership anywhere in the world with over ¾ of all arable land in the country under the control of just 3% of the population – 1.2 billion acres of which (40-60% in total) is lying permanently idle and unused.^[1] It is within this particular historical context that the emergence of the Landless Rural Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* – MST) and its ongoing struggle for agrarian reform in Brazil must be understood.

Land ownership patterns in Brazil have shown extremely little variation over time, suggesting deep rooted collusion between the state and the traditional land owning elite to preserve the prevailing status quo. From the colonial era wherein land (under the *latifundio* system) was treated as a symbol of status and a measure of proximity to power; to the military dictatorship of the 1960s – 80s under which rural production underwent a process of intense neoliberal restructuring; and finally, under a return to civilian rule in the mid 1980s whose decided focus continues to be political stability and economic growth, no government (past or present) has gone so far as to fundamentally challenge existing land ownership laws in Brazil, much less seriously address the wider question of agrarian reform.

Yet the contemporary state has taken more measures in the interests of agrarian reform than any efforts before it, mediating with the MST the resettlement of millions of urban and rural landless, overseeing disputed land title claims with the movement, and guaranteeing a variety of essential services within its numer-

ous won settlements. If we are to accept that agrarian reform in Brazil of the kind that the MST actively seeks is contrary to the interests of the traditional land owning elite and global dominant capital, with which the state has historically been aligned, the resulting question necessarily follows: how can the state both endorse a limited agrarian reform, yet under the current neoliberal regime remain ideologically opposed to it?

Advancement of a limited agrarian reform in Brazil is not only entirely consistent with the overall logic of capital but is in fact a central tenet of the wider neoliberal project occurring in the country today, allowing the vast, unexploited expanse of the countryside to do as much to resolve the existing challenge of mass urban and rural unemployment as to fundamentally undercut the revolutionary potential of the MST as a movement. The dynamic relationship between the state and the MST is thus not one of genuine horizontal cooperation, nor of co-optation from above, but instead the product of historical pressure and mobilization from below in which the state has favored a limited agrarian reform *under its auspices* over a genuine agrarian reform wherein the threat of broader social change *beyond its control* would be the likely, if not inevitable, result.

ORGANIZATION & VISION

The formation of the MST can be understood as the cumulative expression of at least three fundamental processes: first, a conservative capitalist modernization program launched in the 1960s specifically targeted toward the agricultural sector that only intensified the conflict over land; secondly, an ideological convergence between Latin American liberation theology under the Catholic Church, ideas inspired from the Marxist left, and the MST's own unique synthesis of radical pedagogy and praxis, commonly referred to in the movement as '*mística*'; and lastly, the vital experience of collective organization gained throughout the 1960s-70s under the military dictatorship, when land occupations (albeit small scale and largely spontaneous at the time) were first explored as an effective means of resistance.^[2]

At the very core of the MST as a movement lies a general emancipatory project that is integrally linked but not limited in scope to the question of agrarian reform. In thought in as much as action, the pursuit of agrarian reform and wider social change in Brazil are not mutually exclusive aims but, in fact, together constitute the twin pillars that guide the MST – one cannot be accomplished without the mutual fulfillment of the other; that is to say, in order to achieve agrarian reform, a prior transformation of existing social relations is required, which in turn cannot hope

to succeed under the same mode of production from which the inherent exploitation therein originates. As the mandate of the MST, taken here from its own website, suggests:

“...this proposal for agrarian reform is part of a desire of the Brazilian working class for a new society: egalitarian and socialist. In this sense, the measures proposed as necessary form part of broad process of changes in society, and fundamentally, of a change from the present-day capitalist structure of the organization of production.”^[3]

Consisting of coordinating bodies at the regional, state, and national levels within an overall cooperative framework, the MST represents a highly complex model of grassroots democracy. Autonomous from the state or any given political party affiliations, MST settlements assume a dual political and economic character that must coexist in order to produce a community of people who are, according to one MST leader, “...responsible, politically aware, culturally developed, and in solidarity and brotherhood with each other.”^[4] Each MST settlement (within given limits that reflect the guiding principles of the movement at large) enjoys a degree of relative autonomy that can result in a diverse range of rules, customs, and even patterns of land use between them. Although in principle land use between individual MST settlements may vary from cooperative to private or some combination of both, in practice virtually every aspect of daily life – be it in the form of practical knowledge or manual labour – is already by default communal.

Practical knowledge and manual labour are in themselves not only indivisible but together constitute a mutually reinforcing cycle of pedagogy and praxis that perpetually reproduces itself within the movement. Even within MST settlements that are arranged under private plots for example, all major projects that require manual labour beyond the given capacity of an individual or their family, such as the construction of a house, are coordinated between units of 5-15 families (called a *núcleo de base*); each individual within a unit brings with them to the group their own unique knowledge and set of skills to the task ahead, the cumulative effect of which is practical knowledge that was once specific to its owner is now socialized, and manual labour that was once exploitative is now a common collective enterprise imbued with new transformative possibility.

The current system of organization within the MST, as well as the corresponding objective to construct a ‘new society’ therein, could hardly be possible without the unique combination of pedagogy and praxis that have come to form the ideological basis underpinning the movement. Since the inception of the MST, education has always been understood as a critical tool of empowerment – not only to educate the youth, or politicize its membership in general, but also to ensure that together they will have the collective means to become active agents toward their own self-determination.

A sense of collective identity and common cause cultivated through the representation of words, art, music, poetry, symbolism, and the general social realities under which the movement must operate, encompasses what is known as the ‘*mística*.’^[5]

Mística forms part of the movement, but is not institutionalized; it is spiritual, but not religious or denominational in that there are no formal rules that are to be followed; rather it refers to a general sentiment, shared and experienced principally through a historical connection to the land that is at once profound and irreducible to any single explanation. A member of the MST summarizes the significance of *mística* as follows:

“*Mística* is also used to refer to the more abstract, emotional element, strengthened in collectivity, which can be described as the feeling of empowerment, love, and solidarity that serves as a mobilizing force by inspiring self sacrifice, humility, and courage.”^[6]

STRUCTURAL ORIGINS

The MST has in the span of 25 years of organized struggle come to represent not only the single largest social movement in Latin America but also one of the leading sites of resistance to neoliberal rule globally, expressing the popular will of millions of disenfranchised urban and rural poor alike. Founded during the final year of the military dictatorship in 1984 following a gathering of rural peasants, sharecroppers, and small-scale family farmers from across 16 Brazilian states, the MST today comprises an estimated membership of two million people and is currently organized in 23 of the country’s 26 states. Under the popular banner of ‘occupy, resist, produce!’, the MST assumes non-violent direct action through occupations of idle or otherwise unproductive land in order to apply pressure on the state to redistribute the land in favor of those who work it.

The process of staging land occupations typically consists of two critical stages: under the first and by far most precarious stage (called an *encampamento*/encampment), members of the MST usually assess the potential site as to its level of productive use several months in advance, whereupon if the land is deemed either idle or extremely underexploited they then commence to occupy it and establish temporary black plastic tents therein; during the following stage (called an *assentamento*/settlement), the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (*Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária* – INCRA) undertakes a formal evaluation of the occupied land while the MST enues to petition the government to award the land title to the movement, which even when successful is a process that can take anywhere between 2-10 years of bureaucratic wrangling with the state.

Beyond the historical and material impetus underpinning the strategy of large scale land occupations as a means to redress a deep-rooted tradition of unequal land distribution, no such course of action would be in any way sustainable today were it not for the constitutional basis under which, meeting certain conditions, it is deemed legitimate under Brazilian law. The latest version of the Brazilian constitution (1988) states that all arable land in the country is required to serve its “wider social function,” authorizing the government (as per Article 184) to expropriate for the purposes of agrarian reform any such property that does not fulfill this central criteria. Article 86 of the Brazilian constitution for example, stipulates that the “wider social function” of rural

land encompasses, among various provisions: rational and adequate use, environmental preservation, and compliance with governing labour relations standards.^[7]

Although basic criteria regulating land expropriation is guaranteed under the current Brazilian constitution, whether or not rural land is meeting its “wider social function” is a matter entirely subject to government interpretation, whereby a long and protracted legal process – if not outright bureaucratic obstruction in the interests of the traditional land owning elite – usually follows. Illegal land acquisitions through fraudulent or forged titles (called *grilagem*) carried out by large landowners is another common practice that continues to forestall a process of meaningful land redistribution in Brazil. Failing all other means of recourse available to them – including negotiation, petition, and appeals to constitutional law – the MST sees itself with little choice but to advance the cause of agrarian reform where the state itself has failed to do so. MST land occupations have, in this way, now resettled approximately 350,000 families on over 48,000,000 hectares of land.^[8]

LAND AS POWER: FROM DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRATIC RULE

Land in Brazil has traditionally been much more than a mere factor of production, serving as a manifestation of both wealth and political power in the country. Whereas under the U.S. Homestead Act (1862) land was granted to anyone who settled on it, Brazil’s Land Law (*Lei da Terra* – 1850), in contrast, prohibited the acquisition of land by any means outside of purchase; inasmuch in law as in practice, little has changed since. Under a widely decentralized and regionally-based federal state apparatus, the traditional land owning elite still assumes a degree of influence over land ownership policy in Brazil that is altogether unrivaled. Rather than attempt to reverse the historical pattern of land concentration in Brazil, the state has instead committed itself to ensure the successful incorporation of the countryside into an overall modernization program whereby agricultural, industrial, and financial sources of capital accumulation can effectively coexist while leaving the wider question of agrarian reform off the political agenda.

During the era of the military dictatorship in Brazil – and only deepened with renewed conviction under each successive government thereafter – rural production underwent a process of intense neoliberal restructuring that, still today, continues to inform state policy toward the question of agrarian reform. Fulfilling only a minimal degree of land redistribution such that complete social unrest would not erupt in the countryside, the military dictatorship was much more attentive to matters relating to order and security than to the historical grievances of the rural and urban poor. While the struggle for land was being portrayed by the military dictatorship as archaic and increasingly irrelevant under modern capitalism, land owners saw improved tax breaks, subsidized credit, and price supports that both intensified land concentration and destroyed traditional family farming in the process. Adopting economic modernization as a substitute for wider land redistribution, the military dictatorship would prove a vital ally to the interests of the traditional land owning elite and global dominant capital alike.

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-98; 1999-02), following the transition to civilian rule, would inherit a neoliberal development model that was producing an extreme gap between wealth and poverty in the countryside such that even the Brazilian right-wing at this point conceded the need for at least a limited agrarian reform. The Cardoso administration thus oversaw a scale of land redistribution in Brazil that still remains unsurpassed today, securing for the purposes of agrarian reform over 28 million acres of land and authorizing more settlements than all previous governments between the years of 1970-94 combined.^[9] Nevertheless, far from representing a gesture of goodwill, or suggesting a major departure with prior state policy, the Cardoso administration understood above all else that idle and unproductive land to the extent that it exists in Brazil is useless to the interests of economic growth; the agricultural sector was one of the most competitive in the country and could at once “...generate exports, anchor the Real Plan [aimed at financial stabilization], provide cheap food to the cities, and survive any deepening regional trade integration that the government decided to undertake.”^[10]

Under an exploding rate of rural unemployment that saw an estimated 25 million people at the time (a figure now probably even higher) go without access to any land, the Cardoso administration not only successfully avoided the creation of a huge reserve army of labour in the countryside through piecemeal land redistribution but, within an overall neoliberal framework, was able to ensure the continued exploitation of resettled families by keeping them externally dependent on crop seeds, agrochemicals, machinery, and various other inputs. Even when land was expropriated and settlements were awarded, the process often consisted of collusion between INCRA officials and land owners to purchase the land at a higher price than its actual market value; a September 1999 study contains evidence of no less than 70 such cases in which the Cardoso administration overpaid for land in excess of \$7-billion, enough money to resettle on the same land an additional 300,000 families.^[11] Because the cost of the land is typically part of the debt contracted by resettled families, it could in many cases take a lifetime to pay off. Unable to service the debt, ¼ of these families ended up leaving the settlements within 2 years in order to migrate to the city seeking work, only to find themselves inhabitants of massive urban slums (called *favelas*) shortly thereafter.

Despite its often celebrated accomplishments in the area of land redistribution, in the final analysis the Cardoso administration suggested far more continuity than change. The record scale of land redistribution accomplished during Cardoso’s two terms in office can be attributed as much to historical pressure and mobilization from below as to the knowledge that cooperation with the MST toward a limited agrarian reform would be strategically superior to a potentially revolutionary conflict in the countryside. But with resistance has come success, which in turn has brought repression. As the scale of MST land occupations since the 1970s has soared, so too has state repression in response. Repression against the MST is driven overwhelmingly by the concern that the intensification of the conflict over land in Brazil might serve as a template to be reproduced elsewhere, posing a legitimate threat to the prevailing logic of neoliberal rule.

REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

Repression in the form of state-sanctioned massacres of MST members (not to mention those by gun-thugs in the pay of large landowners) has unfortunately been an all too common occurrence throughout the now 25 year history of the movement, stirring outrage within the families of targeted victims, their friends, and Brazilian society at large. But what we have seen in the case of the MST is that repression not only does more to encourage protest than to deter it, but can also win the movement valuable public support and media attention that may sometimes compel the state to be more receptive to its demands. One such example of when repression and opportunity fatefully converged to the advantage of the MST was during the fallout of the now infamous massacre in Eldorado dos Carajás, located in the northern Brazilian state of Pará (April 17, 1996).

Generating both national and international outrage, the massacre was even covered in the traditionally conservative mainstream Brazilian media in terms that were favorable to the MST. Emerging stronger and more defiant than ever, the MST organized a historic march to Brasilia, the country's federal capital, exactly one year after the massacre occurred. Framed as a 'symbolic invasion,' the march took two months to complete – an average of 20 km per day – and received widespread daily media coverage in Brazil; however, the overall objective to open a channel of communication with society and advance the aims of the movement more generally was summarized by one MST member as follows:

"With the authorities, it is like the summary of a soccer game; it does not decide the result, just records the number of goals scored. The game was the march; the arrival in Brasilia and society's reaction was the score. The Landless, the working class, and those fighting against neoliberalism have scored a goal against the FHC [Cardoso] government."^[12]

THE 'LULA' YEARS: SAME STRUGGLE, NEW PHASE

Fully accustomed by now to a hostile neoliberal development model in the countryside, the MST could not help but be somewhat optimistic when former trade union leader Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* – PT) was elected President in 2002. Following three consecutive failed attempts at office since 1989, Lula's election victory split the MST into two separate camps: those who supported putting a temporary halt to all major land occupations in order to give the new government space to operate, confident that genuine change would come in due time; and those who insisted that the struggle for agrarian reform must continue uninterrupted regardless of who is officially in power. But early signs of compromise on several key campaign promises caused Lula's image as a reliable ally to come under serious doubt and essentially settled the debate. It was not long before any MST support for Lula and the PT completely fell silent, replaced first by quiet skepticism, then eventually outright disillusionment with a neoliberal agenda that could scarcely be distinguished from that of the previous Cardoso administration.



Due in large part to a multi-party parliamentary system in Brazil in which no single party, small or large, can effectively govern without first securing a power-sharing alliance with its rivals, Lula came to power on already contradictory terms – accountable to the poor and working class that voted him into office, yet intimately linked to a variety of conservative forces whose interests remain imbedded with the country's business and financial sectors.^[13] When Lula took office vowing to faithfully continue the previous government's dual policy of political stability and economic growth, the message of assurance to foreign investors that Brazil was, in effect, 'open for business' rang loud and clear. Since capitulating to elite interests so early in his presidency, Lula has not only lost the support of former allies such as the MST but even managed to alienate key members of his own party in the process. Several PT officials have since resigned in order to join or form new parties, including most recently Senator and former Environmental Minister Marina Silva who left her post in order to join the Green Party only a few weeks ago. The PT has over time gone from a popular Left platform in the 1980s, to a brand of democratic-socialism in the 1990s, and finally to neoliberal orthodoxy today under Lula.

Despite several key advances made by the Lula administration in recent years that have directly benefited the MST such as higher credit to small family farmers, increasing the minimum wage, and alleviating targeted repression against the movement, the sum of its failures continue to far outweigh the achievements. Under the *National Agrarian Reform Plan (Plano Nacional de Reforma Agrária – PNRA)*, Lula promised to resettle 550,000 families by 2007; however, according to the MST, only 163,000 of them have actually been moved to date – 30% of the total target goal; 500,000 of those families in all were to be awarded legal land titles as well, out of which only 113,000 – 22% in total – have seen such results.^[14] Although the Lula administration refutes such statistics and claims to have in fact reach its stated target goal, the official government records include only those families that have been resettled on existing settlements rather than new or recently occupied camps.^[15]

Land concentration in Brazil has, in fact, increased under the Lula administration due in large part to the intensive monoculture of cash-crops such as sugarcane, soybean, maize, and euca-

lyptus.^[16] Brazil is for example the world's top exporter of sugar-cane-based ethanol fuel, providing over 70% of the total market supply; however, while national revenues from ethanol fuel have grown exponentially, so too have already existing problems in the Brazilian countryside as a direct result: conflict over land, hunger, unemployment, loss of biodiversity, and a renewed concentration of both land and wealth.^[17] Far from the 'green' alternative to harmful fossil fuels that it has been unfittingly branded, the ethanol fuel industry is in reality a total social and ecological disaster that continues to reproduce the same export-oriented logic of rural production that has been in place since the colonial era.

Following the Lula administration's highly controversial decision to lift a ban on the production of genetically modified (GM) crops in 2005, the MST was forced to shift focus somewhat from the traditional land owning elite in Brazil to even more powerful multinational corporations such as Syngenta, Cargill, and Monsanto who together control the lucrative global market of GM seeds. The growing pressure faced by small family farmers to produce higher crop yields on less land than ever before, just in order to stay competitive in the marketplace, has forced many of them to turn increasingly toward GM seeds and agrochemicals that not only encourage debt but pollute the land in the process. In addition, the general trend toward vertical integration by way of mergers and acquisitions has only served to consolidate corporate power over the agricultural sector in Brazil.

Under the fashionable rhetoric of the popular Left, Lula has attempted to win over the support of the urban and rural poor even as he advances a neoliberal agenda whose aim is to ensure that they will continue to suffer. Unfortunately, the upcoming elections in 2010 seem to forecast little change as the two lead candidates so far are Lula's handpicked successor and Conservative São Paulo State Governor Jose Serra. But the MST has always assumed a safe distance from the formal political arena, fully aware that social change does not come from the routine election of leaders, but instead grassroots mass mobilization and direct action to which those in power merely serve as the backdrop. As a young MST activist affirms, "The difficulties under Lula are great, but our mission is greater."

CONCLUSION

The struggle for land in Brazil is the inevitable product of a history of rural production that, under the current configuration of neoliberal capitalism, is increasingly outmoded. Between the respective governments of the military dictatorship, President Cardoso, and current President Lula, each of them has pursued a modernization program of the country's agricultural sector that has put productivity and poverty in the countryside in direct conflict with each other – a necessary contradiction in the interests of 'national development'; the possibility that access to land could actually *improve* productivity has never been seriously explored, instead favoring market-based solutions to historically-rooted social problems. Agrarian reform as state policy has thus been advanced only insofar as it could preempt the threat of a wider social upheaval. The MST itself represents an alternative model of development – one that is at once rooted in the spirit of struggle

of the past, the hope and aspirations of millions of urban and rural poor of today, and the 'new society' of tomorrow. **R**

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Things have to change. We have to change things. We have to struggle for working class rule

Trevor Ngwane

Everyday working class life is a life of pain. It is a life in which no ordinary person is free of oppression and exploitation. If you do not have a job, you are a victim. If you have a job, you are the victim of exploitation and alienation. That is the truth of capitalism. Sometimes individuals can fight and claw their way out of the worst of capitalism. But that leaves everyone else behind to suffer the worst of capitalism. Sometimes a few people can defend themselves against the worst of capitalism. Sometimes, through struggle, there can be victories against capitalism. None of these is ever secure. Each one is threatened the next day. There is no stability, no security, no solidarity. This is not life for human beings. It has to change. It has to be changed. We have to change it. We have to make the future free from all oppression, exploitation and alienation into the reality of everyday life. That is the communist future.

These things are necessary. They are very hard to achieve. Communism will not come easily or quickly. There is no shortcut, no easy road and no simple guarantee. So, is there no alternative? Is there no other way except the long hard road of struggle? Yes. There is an alternative. It is exactly what is happening today. These are the two alternatives: the road of capitalist rule or the road toward working class rule.

We know it is necessary to free ourselves from capitalist rule. But is working class rule possible? Can it really happen? My main point in this opening essay for the Reimagining Society Project is that there is only one way to answer this question finally. It is to make it happen, to make it possible. We cannot afford to wait because in any case “we are the ones we have been waiting for.” It is the millions and millions of ordinary working class people whose organization and action will make a communist future possible and a reality. Our job as the left is to strengthen and support their effort. This means supporting working class political organization. It also means critically assessing and then enhancing our politics as the left.

THE LEFT AND THE REVOLUTIONARY SUBJECT

Doubt has set in among the left. Worse, doubt and despair has set in among millions of ordinary people who cannot see an alternative to capitalism. To make my point clear I want to tackle briefly the question of the revolutionary subject. In South African left circles you will come across a debate that says we must not fetishise the revolutionary subject and we must not fetishise forms of organization. In ordinary language what is meant is that

we must not act as if the working class, in particular, the industrial worker, will automatically make the revolution. It also means that we must not act as if trade unions are necessary and progressive. Lastly, it means we must not act as if a political party, a working class party, is always necessary to take the struggle forward to socialism and communism.

Where does the doubt and demoralization come from which leads to a questioning of the first principles of (Marxist-inspired) revolutionary struggle? A cursory examination of the history of the left in South Africa (I am certain there are parallels in other countries as well) shows that the left must first blame the enemy, the capitalists, and then blame itself for its present demoralization and loss of direction. Because you are drifting when you begin to question what you are about, what you stand for, when you start to doubt whether you will reach your goal using the old tried and tested methods of your own movement. And you are lost when you reject the theoretical foundations, political principles and organizational methods of the workers’ movement. The left are demoralized today because when they look at their own history they find a lot to disappoint them.

They remember the time when some of them announced that the industrial workers were automatically the vanguard. Today, they think that the industrial worker has become a new aristocracy – comfortable, secure, and not interested in struggle. In this view, the industrial worker has betrayed their hopes. They remember the time when they occupied positions inside the trade unions and won victories in policy conferences. It is very different for them now. The trade unions have betrayed their hopes. In South Africa many left activists, including myself, were purged right out of the unions. And the union leadership continues to drum up support for the pro-capitalist neoliberal ruling party.

They remember when they were members of left groups of ten and twenty and a hundred people who thought that they were the centre of the political universe. They thought that their ideas and politics was leading thousands and millions. And it is not like that today. Everything and everyone has betrayed their hopes. They look around and find the individualism and self-indulgence of loose autonomism. They saw and participated in the rise of the social movements and found their new answer. They join these things together. Some of them announce that the working class does not even exist anymore. Some of them announce that Marxism is dead. But it is not easy. Not long ago they placed all their hopes in the social movements – and they are finding that the political problems of everyday life and struggle do not go away

if you sidestep the unions and you sidestep political organization. Now they are shifting – and placing the same hopes in the “service delivery struggles.” The latter are the protest actions, demonstrations, marches and riots that pepper the South African political landscape which, together with strikes, are occurring at the rate of 10,000 a year, according to official estimates.

There is another way of looking at the question of the revolutionary subject. Instead of making it a question of theory, categories and concepts, it can be a question of political action. In fact, it must be a question of political action. What happens if we ask the question from this viewpoint – the viewpoint of struggle and action? It becomes a different question and, though daunting, it does not lead to demoralization, blaming and feelings of betrayal. Is there a revolutionary politics? Is there a revolutionary vision? Are there ways of acting which are revolutionary – a revolutionary practice? Are there mobilizations which promote the revolutionary struggle? Are there revolutionary agents? This is not just a set of questions which can be answered in front of a computer or by looking in a book or many books. They are questions which can only be answered in struggle. They are not just questions of analysis and understanding: they are also a call to action.

From this point of view we can say with some certainty: there will be revolutionary subjects when, through mobilization, with vision, organized together – we help each other to become revolutionary subjects. There will be revolutionary organization when, mobilized together, with revolutionary vision, we organize together in struggle.

The lesson is that the revolutionary subject does not come and go, develop and disappear out of analysis. The revolutionary subject comes and goes, develops or disappears through action and struggle. If through struggle itself there is no development of the revolutionary subject then we have one major problem: there will be no revolution. If through struggle the millions of ordinary working class people do not make themselves – with whatever support and encouragement – into the revolutionary subject – then again there will be no revolution. We can say the same things about the revolutionary form of organization.

The analysis, theory and understanding we need is not about whether and where there is a revolutionary subject and revolutionary form waiting and ready to be defined. It is about what is



necessary, and how we work together to build the strength and capacity of the mass of ordinary working class people. It means understanding, vision, organization and action. Demoralization and viewing ourselves as centres of the political universe are taking us away from doing this necessary job. We need to restore our hope and confidence in the capacity of ordinary working class people. We need eyes that are constantly on the look out for signs and confirmations of the capacity of workers to build their own organization and mobilization together.

THE LEFT AND THE POWER OF ORDINARY WORKERS

Society needs a socialist revolution if it is to build a communist society. The socialist revolution depends on millions of ordinary working class people taking history into their own hands. It depends on their organization, action and interference. Without that, the revolution will not happen. There has to be a socialist revolution against capitalism. However, these things will not just happen. They have to be made to happen in struggle and through struggle. If there was going to be a day when the millions suddenly all just decided to make a revolution, then we could just wait patiently for that day. But it is not like that. Many things happen in the lives of ordinary working class people everyday to deny them as agents of their own revolution. Capitalism itself survives by undermining the strength, confidence, mobilization and independent class organization of the working class. As Marxists our politics and our perspectives tell us these things. Our politics also tells us that despite all of this, we have to have confidence and hope in the capacity of ordinary working class people and that we must be constantly searching for the signs and possibilities of this capacity of ordinary working class people to build their own organization and mobilization together. A healthy left cannot survive and continue to struggle unless it has that hope and confidence. It cannot survive unless it can see contradictions – the pressures to move forward unified in struggle as well as the pressure to give up and fight with other workers over the crumbs from the capitalist table. But the truth is that many of the left in South Africa have lost that hope and confidence. Here we are talking about the old left, that is, people my age (50 years or so). Many of the young left, such as my son who is a 24 year-old revolutionary socialist, have never had that hope and confidence in the working class. They have become politically conscious at a time of mass demobilization, not a time of mass mobilization like the old left. Most of them have never been in a democratic meeting of ordinary workers or been part of a mass action of ordinary workers. They have not had the chance to feel and see the solidarity and strength of working class mobilization on the ground.

All around we see a left that is directionless, tired, demoralized, lacking energy and enthusiasm. Above all else, we see a left that is not willing to engage politically with ordinary workers. In particular, it is a left that will not engage directly with workers around the real fears and real obstacles which stop them from moving forward together. It is not a left searching with hope and confidence in workers to move forward against and in direct confrontation with all the problems and obstacles. Instead, it is a left

searching for echoes. It is a left looking for a place of refuge. Like refugees.

We don't mean that the left in South Africa is doing nothing; far from it. There is a lot of commitment and activity. But too often, there is a pattern: it is a pattern of people who have lost hope in the power of the millions. Indeed, some of them never had such hope in the masses of ordinary working class people. This pattern is of people looking for ways of finding refugees and echoes. What do we mean by refugees? We mean people who themselves are not searching for the ways to reach the mass of ordinary workers, but instead searching for ways to get away from them. People who are not looking for ways to struggle against bureaucracy in the trade unions, but people who are instead looking for ways to get away from it. People who are not looking for ways to struggle with their class brothers and sisters around them against the pain of everyday life – but people who have started to think that ordinary workers do not feel that pain and will never be willing to do anything about it. People who are not looking for ways to challenge the loss of hope and the theft of hope among ordinary workers – but people who are looking to escape that job. What do we mean by echoes? We mean a chorus in which the left speaks to itself, trying to speak louder and louder – and engages only with those who will simply echo the chorus. Preaching to the converted but never repeating the sermon outside the room to the millions and millions. And repeating it to people who are refugees and who will also never repeat it outside the room.

Many of this left are comrades who learnt their politics in the struggles of the 1980s when the working class was mobilizing against the apartheid regime. These comrades have looked around to find something and someone waiting. When they were involved in building the unions, they thought they had found the millions. They thought they were the centre of the universe – and that the hundreds of thousands and millions were listening and learning from them. When the ANC was unbanned, they went there – many of them also to the SACP. Still, they were the centre of the universe. They proposed policies and found leaders who listened to them. Because these were left wing policies, it was useful for some leaders to borrow the policies to win support from the masses. When the ANC came to run the bourgeois government, they did not need support anymore. They only needed the support of the masses once every election. And so they did not need the left to bring them policies. When this happened to the left, many went running to the social movements. Of course it was necessary and important – as it still is – to build the social movements. But the problems of bureaucracy, reformism and class collaboration do not just go away. And neither did the idea amongst some of the left that they were the centre of the political universe. They found hundreds and thousands of working class people who were frustrated and angry. They issued declarations and made speeches and thought again that the hundreds and thousands and millions were listening to them. The future lay in the social movements – and they were the political heart of the social movements. Now this too is gone.

Some of them have gone as refugees to NGOs. They are tired and demoralized. They bring exhaustion and demoralization to

their old political method. They hear anger and frustration being expressed in the statement: “no land, no vote,” and they applaud. And they start to claim this as their own political creation. They see the anger of ordinary working people against the union leaders, and they applaud. And they start to claim this as their own political creation. They ignore the loss and theft of hope that is so often there amongst the anger. Just as hundreds and thousands have lost hope that anything can ever change and that they can change everything, so the left has lost hope. It struggles to find echoes – and one by one, they have died down.

Some of them are telling us now that the mistake lies in a lack of understanding and the answer lies in theory. There is no revolutionary agent, they say – and the mistake was ever to think that there was one. It was a mistake to think it was the working class; it was a mistake to think it was the unions; it was a mistake to think it was the social movements. The working class is different under globalization and for some, there is not really a working class anymore. The unions are reformist and for some, the unions are the enemy. The social movements are getting nowhere. And when they take refuge in the NGOs, they look for refugees – from belief in the working class; from commitment to the unions; from building the social movements on the ground. There will always be such refugees. And the demoralized left can always find something to do with them, especially if it has resources to attract them. And together they sit and agree that there is no revolutionary subject and complain together about the unions and the political organizations – and the masses.

We have got bad news and good news to share with these comrades. The bad news is this: if there is no revolutionary subject, then there will be no revolution. The good news is this: history happens according to the interference of ordinary working class people – the employed, the unemployed, the skilled, the unskilled, men and women, young and old, gay and straight. That is how history happened – when too many on the left thought it was happening because of the left. That is how the unions were developed, the ANC unbanned, the social movements mobilized. Yes – the left played a part. But it was allowed to play a part by the mobilization and thirst for organization and action of the ordinary worker. Yes, there is no revolutionary subject just waiting there, ready to be discovered by the left. But again and again, with all the problems and all the contradictions and against all the obstacles, ordinary working class people are forced to look for the strength to move forward – and they are forced to look to each other. This has happened, it is happening and it will happen. It is in that struggle that the revolutionary subject is created – not discovered, created.

RESTORE HOPE AND CONFIDENCE IN ORDINARY WORKERS

South Africa has been dubbed the capital country of protest action. There are strikes and riots everywhere. Many workers are angry with the government. During elections they show their anger by saying they will not vote. “No house, no vote” is not an essentially left wing position. It is increasingly an anti-politics position. More importantly, it is more than likely that this is not a

statement of hope in an alternative – but a statement of anger and hopelessness that there can be any real alternative. It is a cry of despair. But the demoralized left applauds and adds that there can be no support for political organization and parties.

Many workers are angry with the union leadership. They show their anger by turning their backs on the unions. Even if they are members, they do not fight for their place inside the union. Instead, they look at it as something separate – sometimes like a shop, selling them something. Anger with union leadership is too often a loss of hope in organization per se. It is not a statement of hope in an alternative – but a statement of anger and hopelessness that there can be any alternative. But the demoralized left applauds and insists that unions are reformist and homes only for the skilled workers.

Many workers have got no hope and no belief in capitalism. But they show this by turning inwards, sometimes with anger, sometimes in silence. Of course workers should have no hope and no belief in capitalism. But this does not mean no hope or belief in anything else. Too often it means that they have lost hope and belief in anything. Some of this is inescapable. Some is of the left's own making – or something to which the left has contributed. The demoralized left applauds the anti-capitalism. But it does not speak with confidence in the working class and of its capacity to build a real alternative – a socialist alternative on the road to communism. There is applause from the demoralized left for anti-capitalism – and silence or even apology when it comes to socialism and communism.

In these ways, the demoralized left does exactly what every other force is doing in the daily lives of workers. It ends up reinforcing the message that there is no real alternative and undermining the confidence of ordinary working class people that they can and must be that alternative themselves – they can and must make themselves the revolutionary subject through struggle. And then the demoralized left looks at what is happening inside the working class – and starts to blame workers for some sort of betrayal.

GOING FORWARD: STRUGGLE FOR WORKERS POWER

We have to remind ourselves that there is nothing of value which is not created by the hands of the working class, forced to work together even under capitalism and the divisions and individualism which it creates. There is no other class which can live without the oppression and exploitation of the working class – and only the working class can create what is necessary for human beings without needing the oppression or exploitation of anyone. We have to restore our hope and confidence in the working class and avoid the mistakes of a demoralized left. We are all part of the left, including myself, and we all face the pressures to make exactly the same mistakes and to do ourselves what we criticize in others. We need to stop being obsessed with ourselves and each other, we need to stop looking inward and start to look outwards to the millions and millions. In this respect there are no shortcuts – we need patient, consistent, ongoing work amongst ordinary workers. Our starting, middle and end points must be:

what is happening amongst ordinary workers? What is happening to hold back unity, organization, struggle, action? What is happening there to build on? What is happening there to challenge the loss and theft of hope? What is happening there to build mobilization against the class enemy?

When we look at the different struggles in South African workplaces and communities questions arise: why don't we draw all the different demands together and consolidate them into a platform – a programme? There are people already supporting these different struggles, so why can't we all unite in support of that platform as acts of solidarity and in pursuit of our own immediate demands? Since in each of these struggles we find the direct or indirect hand of the capitalists, why can't we clearly identify the class enemy, make them visible, and resist any attempt from them to draw us into forms of class collaboration? The struggles are already there – but they are happening separately and without co-ordination, couldn't we pool our different strengths, unite our mobilization, campaign together in a unified way? Each of the struggles is about something immediate on the ground – water, housing, wages, protection of wages. But isn't there something more than the same struggles again and again just to defend ourselves and stand still? Couldn't we guide all this with a vision of solutions. Not just perpetual struggles that never end, just to survive? How possible is it to take all this and say that on our agenda is the struggle to destroy capitalist power? Not just resisting capitalist power and building sufficient power to survive those problems again and again, but the working class and its allies taking power to solve the problems. And if we think and believe that it depends on the millions – that only the working class can free itself and humanity – then shouldn't we say it to them, not just to each other?

These things are not impossible, we can make them possible, they can be made to happen. But when we put all these things together we can see that what we are actually talking about is a process of building political organization of the working class – a mass workers party. Such a party can only exist and grow and move forward in the struggles of everyday life – the struggles that people are already fighting. It is about building solidarity. Today, each and every separate group of ordinary working class must fight and win their own victory – even to defend themselves. And they must fight and win that victory again tomorrow. A workers political party is about stopping that. It is about uniting and pulling together and building solidarity so that the victory of one becomes the victory of all. Today each group of ordinary working class people must fight and win its own victory. And then after that – it must face exactly the same enemy which caused the problem in the first place. Because that enemy is still in power. A workers' political party is about changing that. It is about defending people against the power of the enemy. But it is more than that. It is about defeating the power of the enemy and replacing it with the power of the working class. Not in one struggle. Not for only one day. Not just in one place. Not just on one issue. Comprehensively, everywhere, once and for all. **R**

Trevor Ngwane is a member of the Socialist Group, a small collective of socialists active in the social movements in South Africa.

Successful First Unity Meeting of the Radical Left in France

Nouveau parti anticapitaliste

At the initiative of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), a first meeting of the anti-capitalist and anti-liberal left in view of the coming regional elections (in France) was held on Monday, September 29th.

All parties and movements of the radical left also confirm that there is an urgency to building an alternative to the capitalist and productivist system, defeating the right and implementing an alternative program in the regions. Therefore, given the establishment of a center-left bloc, the NPA has reaffirmed its proposal for a national agreement of joint lists of all the radical left in the 21 electoral regions.

Unity Declaration of the FASE, GU, Alternative, NPA, PCF, CFFOP, PG

The parties and movements met today, Monday, September 28, through a working group and made the following statement:

In a situation characterised by a growing attack by the political right and the employers against the broad sweep of social and democratic rights, we issue a call to support and build the broadest and most united mobilisations and struggles possible around a perspective of political and social confrontation with the government and the employers. The ultimate goal is to inflict a defeat on this reactionary power.

Issues are not lacking – the privatisation of the postal service, the proliferation of layoffs, the spread of Sunday work days, the trend toward temporary and part-time work and insecure living conditions, the undermining of the right to education for all, the increase in hospitalisation fees, the erosion of public freedoms, and the mass deportations of immigrant workers.

Many demonstrations and social and political initiatives are taking place as we meet in the early fall. We support them all, such as the proposed referendum on the privatisation of the postal service, the dem-

onstrations for women's rights on October 17, the marches for jobs, against job insecurity and layoffs or the initiatives in response to the "climate" summit in Copenhagen. ...

In the face of an increasingly brutal and savage capitalist system and a government determined to accelerate the pace of its attacks, nothing should stand in the way of the necessary construction of an alternative to the logic of the capitalist and productivist system. On this basis, we must strive to win the majority of workers and citizens to the perspectives opened by a militant political Left. These are our priorities.

However, given the determination of the Sarkozy government, we are witnessing instead a new shift to the right by the soft Left as it attempts to build a centre-left coalition ... This is a Left that continues to shift to the right and thus risks its own electoral prospects as the unfortunate situation in Italy recently proves.

In this context, the forces that make up the anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist Left have a duty to do everything possible to defeat the right and offer a different path – a political outlet that could implement a program reflecting the demands of the mass mobilisations in the regions, a regional program that is a real alternative to liberalism and productivism.

The overall challenge is not only to counter the political onslaught of the right and liberalism and defend the demands of the workers movement, but even more to reverse the balance of forces at the polls and in the struggles...

Together we can help reverse the relationship of forces between the political right, the employers and the popular classes in struggle and at the polling booths.

At this stage, we know that different approaches exist between us on several points. They are known and we have not sought to evade them during our meeting. We cannot prejudge the sovereign decisions of each of our parties.

But we decided to establish a national policy framework for common discussion to verify the possibility of going forward. Therefore, parties and political movements gathered so far have agreed to a future meeting of our Working Group. It will develop a timetable which will hold discussions on all issues to be resolved to reach agreement

It is a first step, but it is important because the stakes of this election are not only regional but national. Together we can help reverse the power relationship between the right, employers and the working class in struggle and in the polls.

Signatories: Federation for a social and ecological alternative (FASE), United Left, The Alternative, New anti-capitalist party (NPA), the French Communist Party (PCF), Communist Party of French Workers (PCOF), Left Party (PG).

Attending the meeting as observers were delegations from the Social Forum of Popular Quarters (FSQP) and Workers' Struggle (LO). **R**

The German Federal Elections: Centre-Right Wins Majority, Social Democracy Suffers Crushing Defeat, The Left Receives a Boost

Ingo Schmidt

Conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel, who was leading a coalition government with the social democratic SPD (Social Democratic Party) since 2005, will also lead Germany's next government; this time with support from the liberal FDP (Free Democratic Party). In an election that saw voter turn out at a record low of 70.8%, Merkel's party, the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), won 33.8% of the vote. In relative terms, this is just a decrease of 1.4% but the absolute number of voters is down by two million. However, the CDU is, comparatively, by far the strongest party in the next parliament and can rely on a clear majority due to the record high of its future coalition partner FDP who got 14.6% of the vote. Though social democrats expected that their party, the SPD, would continue the downward trend that began with the 2002 elections and continued in 2005, the loss of 11.2% of the vote came as a shock. The 23.0% they received in this year's election are even lower than the 29.2% with which the SPD started their electoral performance in post-war (West) Germany.

The unequal decline of Germany's big parties, CDU and SPD, was complemented by a surge of the small, liberal, green, and left, parties. Most significant in this group is the liberal FDP with 14.6%. This result marks not only an all-time high for the party but also shows a strong taste for neoliberalism among parts of the electorate. No other party in Germany is, even in times of crisis of the economy and neoliberal hegemony, as strongly opposed to taxes and regulations as the FDP. At the other end of the political spectrum, 11.9% for the Left Party (Die Linke) don't look too impressive numerically, but it does signify the establishment of the party as a constant factor in Germany's political system. Considering that the party was only founded as a merger of East Germany's Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and West-German SPD dissidents in 2007, this is a remarkable achievement that indicates the desire for a left voice in the parliamentary arena. Setting off gains and losses across the political spectrum, it looks as if Germany shifted slightly to the right.

	CDU	SPD	FDP	Left Party	Greens
Share of total vote in %	33.8	23.0	14.6	11.9	10.7
Gains and losses in %	-1.4	-11.2	+4.8	+3.2	+2.6
Seats	239	146	93	76	68

However, recent state elections saw a slight move to the left. Though no governments have been formed yet, coalitions between the SPD, the Left Party and the Greens would have majorities in the Saarland and Thuringia. In Schleswig Holstein, a centre-right government will take office but the underlying vote in that state also marks a, albeit pretty minor, shift toward the left. What this means is, although the crash of the social democrats paved the way for a centre-right government on the federal level, that there is no clear trend toward the political right in Germany's political system at this point. And, as will be argued below, there is no clear ideological trend in society either. In fact, the defeat of the SPD at the ballot box is part of the crisis of neoliberal hegemony.

At first glance, it may seem ironic that the SPD, who tried to develop a kind of 'embedded neoliberalism,' took such a severe blow at a time when neoliberalism is shattered by economic crisis and rapidly spreading anxieties regarding future economic and social developments. It seems even more ironic, if not disturbing, that the FDP, who advocate neoliberalism in its most radical form, came as the biggest winner out of this election. Some deliberation suggests, however, that the SPD was defeated because so many of its former voters won't forgive the party's engagement with neoliberalism. The FDP's success, in turn, can be understood as a desperate last call for market principles at a time that these principles can't be sustained without escalating infusions of state money.

CONFLICTING EXPECTATIONS: PROFIT PROTECTION AGAINST SOCIAL AND JOB SECURITY

Organized capital made very clear what it expects from the new government. Ignoring last years financial meltdown, subsequent bank bailouts and fiscal stimulus programs, and also pretending the economic downturn is already over, the new government is supposed to cut taxes, reign in public deficits and to lower social and employment standards. Is this neoliberalism as usual? Not quite. CEOs, capital lobby groups and think tanks are much more nervous and impatient then they were before last year's crisis, let alone during the good old days of the dot.com boom. After raiding government coffers and triggering a flood of money from central banks, they can't wait to shut off the supplies of public money before labour advocates ask for public works programs, the protection of existing jobs and wages, or stepped-up welfare and unemployment benefits. Considering mass sentiments

that see bank bailouts as unfair, CEO pay as unseemly and state intervention as necessary to reduce inequality and create jobs, capital's professed neoliberalism in a hurry seems quite appropriate.

The FDP, backed by its electoral success, presents itself as self-confident driver toward the restoration of neoliberalism. Its support is not limited to organized capital, which, considering how highly capital is concentrated, wouldn't suffice to win close to 15% of the vote. The liberal's electoral base also comprises saturated and precarious middle class. The former find tax breaks an adequate compensation for their continuing political and ideological support of big money, the latter fear that lower taxes and government regulations are the only way to sustain middle class lifestyles or small businesses of any kind. Determined as the liberals may be to push toward a renewed neoliberalism, the conservatives are still the government's heavyweight.

Although there are currents within the CDU who did not like Chancellor Merkel's past conciliatory tone vis-à-vis her social democratic coalition partners, the party still cannot fully embrace neoliberalism. Unlike the liberals, the conservatives are a 'people's party' that has to balance the interests of different social classes. This also includes a conservative welfare state current. Different as this conception may be from a classical social democratic welfare state, it still contains ideas of community, social cohesion and state intervention that are alien to the FDP's guiding myth of individuals whose only way to communicate is through markets. Leading conservatives, including Merkel, already said that the new government wouldn't start a frontal attack on the remnants of the German welfare state. As a matter of fact, the conservatives have very good reasons to very carefully ponder how far toward unfettered neoliberalism they want to go. The electoral decline and eventual defeat that the social democrats suffered since they merged downsized welfare state policies into a neoliberal framework, euphemistically called Third Way, is a clear warning sign that something similar could happen to the conservatives, too. The CDU will be even more cautious about its future direction because it already is a shadow of its former self. Compared to the defeated social democrats, they are still going strong. And yet, compared to the 45%-50% of the vote that they attained from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s, the CDU is already facing a slow but continuing downward trend.

The newly elected centre-right government will face stiffer outside opposition against neoliberal policies than the previous CDU-SPD-coalition did. The SPD has already signalled a modest 'left-turn,' The Left Party now has a stronger voice in parliament than it had before and some union leaders who didn't want to mobilize their membership against social democratic ministers, will be more open to street protests against a centre-right government. With regard to extra-parliamentary opposition it also has to be noticed that the out-going government did everything it could not to offend potential voters before the election. Since the economic crisis became acute last fall, they generously granted wage subsidies to workers working less than their regular hours. Through this measure, drastic income losses and lay-offs could be avoided. Such attempts to protect workers against the fallout



from the crisis temporarily were also backed by organized capital. They did not want to stir things up before it got their preferred government elected. Now that this mission is accomplished, capital's quest for profit protection at the expense of the working class will come to the fore. The working class, in turn, has a better chance to fight for the protection of jobs and social spending due to the Left Party's electoral boost and increased openness of unions to mobilize protest

WELFARE REGIMES AND THE CRISIS OF NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY

To understand why the FDP gained so much during the crisis of neoliberal hegemony, why the SPD lost so drastically and why The Left gained relatively little at a time when a majority of the population seeks less inequality and more state intervention to protect jobs and incomes, it is important to understand in which ways political parties, institutions of the welfare state and class interests have corresponded in the past. This will help to see that minor shifts in electoral results do not necessarily indicate political stability. In fact, the social basis of these results is highly fragile. Because neoliberalism successfully destroyed the welfare state hegemony that guided political parties of different persuasion in Germany during the postwar prosperity, the current crisis of neoliberal hegemony will not lead to a revival of the welfare state as we knew it. The current hegemonic crisis leaves a vacuum, in which parties, for sheer lack of alternative ideas, talk and act as if nothing has changed since last year's financial crash. Chances are that, at one point or another, they will even offend the constituencies they are trying to cater to. The crisis of neoliberalism feeds into accelerating ineffectiveness of the political system, which, in turn, will create political opportunities that were unthinkable under the hegemony of either the welfare state or neoliberalism. To be sure, these opportunities may be seized by progressive or by reactionary forces.

The hollowing out of welfare state and neoliberal hegemonies can be traced back to the founding days of post-war Germany. West Germany's political system was built around an anti-

communist and a welfare state consensus since 1949. Developments in East Germany, where the political system was built around the ideas of an anti-fascist bloc and friendship with the Soviet Union, didn't need any serious consideration because East Germany was defined as the other against which West Germany had to be distinguished as the democratic alternative. If East German socialism had been friendlier to workers than it actually was, the West German ruling class and their American allies would have made an even larger effort to present West Germany as the more attractive system. Their anti-communism was directed against all forms of actually existing and potentially conceivable socialism. It was compensated by the acceptance of a welfare state. The two political parties that were instrumental in building West Germany on the basis of anti-communism and commitment to the welfare state were the conservatives and the social democrats.

Quite correctly, left critics usually saw the conservatives as the party of monopoly capital and as a refuge for old Nazis. Yet, that's not the whole story. Unlike the smaller conservative parties of the Weimar Republic, the CDU was built as mass party, later labelled a people's party, that also represented the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and layers of the working class who identified themselves more in religious rather than in class terms. Catholic workers were particularly strong among these, whereas protestant workers usually voted for Protestantism's secular offspring, social democracy. The SPD, in contrast, was largely a reformist workers' party. However, since the revisionism of Eduard Bernstein at the beginning of the 20th century, the party had – just not very successfully – tried to reach out to the middle classes. Such attempts were only successful during the postwar boom when the old middle class, or petty bourgeoisie, independent small business owners, declined quickly and the new middle class of salaried professionals increased their numbers considerably. Only the merger of working class and middle class voters allowed the

social democrats to catch up with the conservative's electoral successes. In 1972, during a short moment of social democratic hegemony, the SPD passed the CDU with 45.8% to 44.9%. However, even in West Germany's early years, when the CDU was up to 20% ahead of the SPD, the latter shaped the political and social system to an extent out of proportion to its electoral support. While the conservatives maintained an uneasy relationship with the unions, the social democrats were closely tied to organized labour. Thus, as social democratic theoreticians had always envisioned, the party could act as the political voice of the working class. Just not, unlike social democratic theory suggested, the whole working class. Some of its layers either gravitated to the conservatives or remained politically passive.

Both, the SPD and the CDU, were instrumental in organizing West Germany's post-war consensus because they brought partly overlapping and partly complementary interests to the table. While one had closer ties with the unions, the other had better connections with the peasantry and organized capital. They also brought complementary welfare state conceptions to the table. The conservative welfare state was centred on family values and religious community whereas the social democratic welfare state focused on universal suffrage, rationality, and solidarity. Thus, West Germany's welfare capitalism represented more than an accord between labour and capital. It also was a compromise between conservative and social democratic welfare regimes.

The party that didn't contribute to the original design of welfare capitalism in West Germany is the FDP. Anti-communism kept West German society in a state of quasi-mobilization during the Cold War didn't leave much room for political liberalism. National liberalism was partly absorbed by the CDU, social liberalism hardly existed and, where it developed, helped the SPD to attract the emergent new middle class. The FDP had difficulties in developing their profile and attracting voters. However, even without much profile and impact on the shape of the political system, the party had an important role within the system. Until the Greens could establish themselves as a constant factor in electoral politics in the mid-1980s, the liberals almost continually held the balance of power and thus could determine whether the conservatives or the social democrats would lead governments. Until the late 1960s, they preferred partnering with the CDU. Even at the height of their electoral success, the SPD couldn't have formed a government without the FDP as a coalition partner. When this happened in 1969, the postwar conditions dissolved quickly.

By the end of the 1960s, anti-communism changed its strategy from confrontation to a policy of détente with the West German SPD at the forefront of this development. Domestically, a rising tide of labour militancy and youth rebellion challenged the compromise between labour and capital as well as established authorities on both sides of the class divide. Though much of the rebel youth easily identified the SPD as an establishment party, many of their generation who wanted progressive change, but couldn't see themselves as street fighters, joined the party in the 1970s. These cautious progressives saw welfare capitalism as one step on the way of the gradual transformation of capitalism into



socialism and felt the time had come to take the next step. Much to their surprise, the young reformists encountered opposition not only from the class enemy but also from within their own party.

Looking at state socialism in East Germany and the Soviet Union, right wing social democrats were convinced that markets, a euphemism for capitalist economies, are the only way to guarantee efficiency and growth, which, then, would deliver the cake that could be sliced up between wages, profits and taxes. Taking over the bakery, even if this should happen only gradually, was beyond their imagination. More than that: right-wing social democrats saw collective ownership, let alone workers' self-management, as the end of any cake and thus resisted attempts to transform the SPD from a corporatist bargaining machine into a party of socialist reformism.

Stagflation that hit West Germany, as the rest of the capitalist world, at the same time, made the right's dedication to markets and growth even stronger. They were convinced that capitalist accumulation, if properly managed, could go on forever. Unfortunately, the tool of economic management, Keynesianism, seemed to be hijacked by over-ambitious union leaders and a social democratic left keen on handing out free lunches. Eventually, they agreed with Friedman that there simply is no free lunch but an urgent need to combat inflation and cut public spending. The Keynesianism that had served the economic policies so well during the days of prosperity became a contentious issue during times of economic crisis. The left wing of the SPD wanted to move toward a Keynesianism that sees capitalist stagnation as inevitable and a gradual shift toward socialism as possible. The right wing moved toward Monetarism because the restoration of profits was seen as a precondition for future prosperity and the corporatist bargain based on capitalist accumulation.

Internal rifts about Keynesianism and welfare state expansion versus retrenchment weakened not only the social democrats but also had an impact on their coalition party, the FDP. At last, here was a chance for them to make a difference. Leaving the social liberalism that they had hesitatingly adopted since the late 1960s behind, the liberals were the ones who opened the door to neoliberalism in West Germany. Though they would continue to be a small party, in fact, the FDP only won 6.9% of the vote when they moved from a centre-left to a centre-right coalition in 1983, they could establish themselves as agenda setters. Like today, the liberals would push toward an aggressive neoliberalism and the conservatives would scale such claims down to a level that was compatible with continuing mass consent. This division of labour between the bad cop FDP and the good cop CDU lasted until German unification in 1990.

The accession of formerly 'state-socialist' East Germany to capitalist West Germany altered the political and economic geography in ways that the winners of the Cold War had not expected. The conservatives and liberals wholeheartedly, and the social democrats more reluctantly, thought the opening of eastern markets, along with the extension of West Germany's institutions to the East, would trigger a second economic miracle, simi-

lar to the growth period that West Germany experienced after the Second World War.

Yet, what really happened was an unprecedented wave of deindustrialization in East Germany that destroyed the region's economic basis and made it dependent on permanent fiscal transfers from the West. This was neither what conservatives and liberals, who formed a coalition government at the time, had expected nor what East Germans had hoped for.

The political impact of deindustrialization in the East and the fiscal crisis that this produced on the federal level was two-fold. One was that many East Germans felt colonized by the West. Increasing numbers of voters for the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the successor of East Germany's former ruling Socialist Unity Party. The rise of the PDS made it difficult for the SPD to stake out their claims in the East. The left vote, which was already split between the SPD and the Greens in West Germany was further fragmented.

Second, the CDU and FDP advocates of balanced budgets found themselves in the role of the biggest accumulators of public debt in postwar German history. This was one of the reasons why they lost government power to a SPD-Green coalition in 1998. The other major reason was that workers East and West felt that the dot.com boom, picking up steam since the mid-1990s, would pass them without job and particularly without any real wage gains under a CDU-FDP government. As it turned out later, the 1998 elections were the last time that the SPD could mobilize most of their working class supporters. However, it would be wrong to see the election of the SPD-Green government as an end of neoliberal hegemony.

Quite the contrary. Social democrats and Greens presented themselves as the ones who would actually be better able to reign in run-away deficits than their conservative and liberal competitors. This argument, which they stressed very much in their election campaigns, was fully in line with neoliberal principles. The same is true for workers asking for their share in the economic upswing that accidentally happened at the same time. Getting a fair wage for a hard day's work is an idea to which liberals, old and new, conservatives and social democrats can agree, it is actually the productivist core that allows not only cross-class alliances but also links voters of most persuasions to the political system. Party's who, apparently, don't serve this sense of fairness – not getting your rewards for your efforts is seen as grossly unfair – lose electoral support. This is what happened to the CDU and the FDP in 1998.

What was not apparent at the time, were the distributional antagonisms built into the Red-Green vote. As long as the boom, which was largely fed by increasing U.S. demand, lasted, working class voters had good reason to believe that, at one point or another, they would get higher wages without risking their jobs. Moreover, a rising GDP also meant higher tax revenues that allowed deficit reductions without spending cuts. The CDU-FDP government, on the other hand, had appeared as debt accumulators because the deindustrialization of East Germany coincided

with a cyclical downturn, and thus loss of tax revenue, in the early 1990s. While working class voters had the same expectations – political support for jobs and fair wages – in the SPD than in the past, the party’s second electoral pillar had changed fundamentally since the social democrats had lost government power in 1982. New middle class professionals were the ones who moved significant parts of their savings from old-school money socks to the ‘new economy’s’ financial markets. Conservatives, naturally, saw this trend with suspicion. On the other side, German social democrats, inspired by Bill Gates, Bill Clinton and George Soros, ruthlessly spurred middle class taste for computers and fast cash. Working class and middle class support for the SPD lasted until the new economy crashed. Beginning with the 2001 crisis, the working and middle classes deserted the party in increasing numbers, albeit for different reasons and in different directions.

Working class voters had to recognize that, in times of economic crisis, the right wing of the SPD always outflanks the left and puts the restoration of business profit rates over the welfare state and support of wage bargaining. This dedication to capitalist accumulation had cost the SPD government power in 1982, and put them on a downward trend since 2001.

On the other hand, middle class voters, whom the SPD so desperately tried to cater to, were suspicious whether social democrats would be able to give them the tax breaks they desperately needed to meet their income expectations after speculative gains had taken a blow on Wall Street. Thus, the end of the new economy triggered the decline of the SPD, which, after a stopover as the CDU’s junior partner between 2005 and 2009, led them back to the opposition benches in the September 27th election.

NEOLIBERALISM HOLLOWED-OUT

Meanwhile, neoliberal hegemony has hollowed-out to such a degree that current attempts to restore it after the Keynesian interplay that followed last fall’s stock market crash might not be successful. No matter that the gains for the FDP suggest otherwise. East Germans were the first who lost trust in the market. In 1990, a movement that began as a last minute attempt to modernize a sclerotic state socialist system had turned into an even broader movement for accession to West Germany, Deutschmark and

markets. The economic devastation that began as soon as Deutschmark and markets ruled in the East quickly ended East Germans’ market euphoria.

Workers, who had set their hopes in a fair deal between states and markets, were increasingly frustrated with the state being transformed from an instrument of social protection into a machine for profit protection. Eventually, the middle class could never get enough of this profit protection but also had to learn that their savings, left to unfettered financial markets, can easily evaporate over night.

This is the reason why the enthusiasm many middle class voters showed for the FDP’s ultraneoliberalism in the German election could easily turn into a taste for the authoritarian protection of property once the next round of the economic crisis hits. In this case, the FDP might either change its character, like their Austrian counterpart FPÖ did many years ago, or a new far-right party might appear very quickly. The hollowing out of neoliberal hegemony, which began in East Germany in the early 1990s, crept into West Germany after the 2001 crisis and burst into the public arena in the aftermath of the 2008 crash, makes sharp and sudden political right-turn possible that were unthinkable for a long time.

At this point, the Left Party is the only party in opposition to the attempt at the restoration of neoliberalism. It would also be the key point of coalescing if any further rightwing turn in German politics occurs. From this angle, the significance of the electoral boost of the Left Party lies less in increased presence in parliament. It lies in the stabilization of a political force that began, however vaguely, to advocate alternatives to neoliberalism at a time when that doctrine still seemed to be the only way of economic and social development. Whether the Left Party is ready to live up to these openings is an entirely different question. It is also possible that the party gets torn apart between the temptation of occupying government positions and building the base for independent working class political action, or even a wider rebellion. **R**

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Further Reading:

For more on Social Democracy, The Left and the German labour movement see:

Ingo Schmidt, ‘German Labour Experiences Since World War Two: A Suggested Interpretation,’ *Labour/Le Travail*, N. 63 (Spring 2009), at www.lltjournal.ca/index.php/llt.

For a more recent account of the Left Party see: Ingo Schmidt, ‘Germany’s New Left Party,’ *Relay*, N. 26 (2009), at www.socialistproject.ca/relay/relay26.pdf.

The Right Wing Falls in Greece

Antonis Davenellos

The results of the October 4, 2009 elections in Greece were a political earthquake that have created a new situation in the country. Certainly, the top news is the electoral and political defeat of New Democracy (ND), the traditional party of the right wing, which has been in power since 2004. With only 33.4 percent of the vote and 91 seats in parliament (down from 151 in the 2007 elections), ND had the worst showing for the right in Greece since the civil war of 1946-49. The same evening of the elections, Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis resigned from the leadership of ND.

The crushing defeat of the party has opened up a period of deep political crisis for the right, a crisis that by all indicators will be long lasting. There are at least four candidates to be the new leader of the party – and they can't even agree on the manner in which a new leader should be elected.

The reasons for the collapse of the right are many. The corporate media like to highlight the scandals – many of them – involving members of Karamanlis' cabinet. But other reasons proved to be far more serious: In the five-and-a-half years of ND governments, the working class and the youth have accumulated many bitter experiences from the neoliberal reforms of the right. The repression with which Karamanlis answered the youth rebellion of last December has isolated the right among young people. More important than any other reason, though, was Karamanlis' attitude amid the economic crisis.

At his annual speech on the economy in September at the Thessaloniki International Fair, the prime minister openly endorsed the need for harsh measures to bring down the national debt and budget deficit, even using the term “freezing” in relation to wages and pensions – a move which, according to opinion polls, instead “froze” hundreds of thousands of working people against ND and created, a month before the elections, a wave of outrage against the party.

The winner of the elections is the social democratic party PASOK (Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement). Under the leadership of Georgios Papandreou Jr – the son and grandson of former prime ministers – the party gathered 43.9 percent of the vote and elected 160 members of parliament (MPs), getting the majority it was seeking by a comfortable margin of 10 seats.

PASOK conducted a classic social democratic campaign. Party leaders spoke of income redistribution and of raising social spending, while condemning the “medieval” conditions in labour relations. They showed attention to environmental matters, speaking of some sort of “green development.”

Yet for all that, PASOK never assumed any concrete obligations to meet the important demands raised by workers and youth. For example, on the critical subject of raising wages and pen-

sions – against Karamanlis' policy of “freezing” them – PASOK's program speaks of increases above current official inflation rates, which translates to 0.3-0.5 euros (45 to 75 cents) per day.

This tactic of doubletalk, though, had a dual effect. On one hand, PASOK was recognized by the ruling class as the most suitable alternative to the threat of government instability and political crisis brought on by the rapidly advancing collapse of Karamanlis. On the other, PASOK became the way to punish Karamanlis, making the social democratic party the beneficiary of popular anger.

But this electoral shift to PASOK was made without any enthusiasm – without creating a popular current for “change.” In real numbers, PASOK received 3 million votes – exactly as many as it got in 2004, when it was defeated by ND, and Karamanlis came to power! This numerical paradox can be explained by the drop in voter turnout.

In Greek politics, there is a traditional “overpoliticization” in contrast to other European countries. In the era since the fall of dictatorship in 1974, Greek voter turnout was, on average, around 80 percent. But since the elections of 2004 and 2007, it has gradually declined, and in this latest vote, it dropped to 68 percent. This reflects Greek voters' questioning of the two-party system that has taken place in other countries in the neoliberal era.

This observation is important in understanding the dynamics of political developments in Greece. The day after the elections, the media stated that “the country had a strong government,” with many adding that the total vote captured by the two parties of power remains at a high level (79 percent).

But all this is a numerical game than political analysis. The very evening of the elections, future ministers of PASOK, watching the rapid collapse of ND, were forced to admit that “the political cycle of replacing [parties] in power has narrowed” because of the crisis, and because of the convergence between social democrats and the right on economic and social policies. In reality, things are much worse for all of them: the torrent of anger that demolished Karamanlis now confronts PASOK.

For the time being, the angry public is observing the new government, waiting for its first serious moves in power. But everybody knows the ‘honeymoon’ will be very short. And a contradictory party like PASOK – following the same policies as Karamanlis, while it is forced to use populist rhetoric – could prove to be much less resilient than ND to the blows of the movements of workers and the youth.

However, the left in Greece wasted a serious opportunity in these elections. Its percentage total remained at about the same level – 13 percent.

The KKE (Communist Party of Greece) stayed the third party, with a small retreat to 7.5 percent from 8.2 percent in earlier elections. This stagnation shows that the tactics of its leadership has reached their limits. KKE is a party characterized by its absolute isolation of its forces from the rest of the left and mass movements outside its control, and also complete adherence to Stalinist orthodoxy. In these elections, the KKE was forced to ask for the support of “other radicals” outside its ranks, without any success.

Its more serious decline in the larger working class areas highlights even more its political weaknesses. In this context, the public remarks by the party’s general secretary for the last 20 years, Aleka Papariga, that she could possibly be replaced may be the beginning of internal developments.



SYRIZA – the broad united front coalition of the radical left, in which the International Workers Left participates – got 4.6 percent of the vote, electing 13 MPs. It registered

a small decline from the 5 percent of 2007 – a result that was seen as a big success at the time.

Despite the drop, the result has been recognized as a victory in the mass media since many polls at the beginning of the campaign gave SYRIZA less than the 3 percent minimum for candidates to gain entrance to parliament.

The reason for these low expectations was that SYRIZA appeared to suffer from the pressure put on it by PASOK to achieve an independent parliamentary majority. PASOK was assisted in this effort by the center-left orientation of the right wing of Synaspismos (SYN), a reformist left party and the largest tendency in SYRIZA. At the same time, SYN went through a paralyzing leadership crisis, from which it emerged with many losses, despite the reaffirmation of its young chairman Alexis Tsipras, who is supported by the SYN left wing and party youth.

SYRIZA passed this critical test mostly thanks to the determination of its left-wing supporters, but also because of the politics of its campaign: attacking the political measures of ND in their specifics, condemning the politics of PASOK, and demanding a “protective shield” for working people and the youth from the attacks of the bosses.

Activists put out the demands of SYRIZA on a massive scale. These included calls for the abolition of “rented” and “temporary” labour, mass hiring for hospitals and schools, and an increase in real raises for wages and pensions. This approach put SYRIZA in position to clash with Karamanlis and clearly differentiate from the generalities of PASOK.

Also participating in the elections was an alliance of many organizations of the far left (among them the Greek Socialist Workers Party, or SEK) under the acronym ANTARSYA. This

grouping got 25,000 votes (0.36 percent), a low percentage surpassing only extremely sectarian old Stalinist-Maoist groups.

This showing certainly doesn’t do justice to the continuous presence and efforts of these comrades in resistance movements. And it is proof that in Greece – as in many European countries – the prerequisite for national electoral tactics for the far left is united front collaboration at a broader level.

Meanwhile, the racist, extreme right-wing party LAOS received 5.6 percent of the parliamentary vote. This is less than it expected given the conditions of collapse of the big party of the right, ND. Nevertheless, the crypto-fascists of LAOS remain a significant threat. That underlines the importance of the antiracist struggle that SYRIZA has adopted as one of its main orientations – and which DEA is organizing with all its forces.

A further comment must be made about what the European press calls “the triumphant return of PASOK.” This is an obvious attempt to prop up the European social democratic parties that have suffered successive electoral defeats, as in Germany.

This euphoria is completely out of touch with reality. Greek capitalism is going through a deep crisis. The chairman of the Bank of Greece informed the newly elected government that the deficit by the end of the year will skyrocket to 12 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), making a joke of the previous predictions of 6 percent. Thus, the harsh policies that Karamanlis dared to propose, and which led to his party’s demise, will reappear – this time as the mandatory framework for the policies of the new prime minister Papandreou.

At the same time, the movements of mass resistance have not retreated from the scene. The continuous small and big struggles by workers and the youth will now be the real opposition to Papandreou. This opposition from below, large and militant, has already proved in Karamanlis’ case that it can push “powerful governments” toward collapse.

Two years ago, when PASOK was still in crisis after its electoral defeat, SYRIZA was polling numbers as high as 18 percent. A section of the base of social democracy had turned its search for hope toward the radical left.

This connection is still possible. Only this time, it won’t be in the paper results of opinion polls. It can happen in the streets – in the struggles against the policies of a government that, while speaking about workers and the people, is being shaped by the interests of the bankers and the bosses.

One major requirement for this to happen is the unifying of a truly radical left. SYRIZA won this bet in the elections of October 4, and now must keep going in a period that certainly looks very important and interesting. **R**

Antonis Davenellos is a leading member of International Workers Left (DEA) and the left coalition SYRIZA.

Copenhagen Debate Looms

Phil Ward

Any hopes that the December Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen will produce a treaty on greenhouse gas emission reductions are fading rapidly. Janos Pasztor, director of the UN Climate Change Support Team, admitted on 27 October that there was no agreement on targets for industrialised countries, or on funding to help developing countries limit their emissions. Neither was there any indication that the U.S. Congress would agree President Obama's proposals for emissions abatement.

Even if targets are agreed, they will be wholly inadequate. Obama's target for the U.S. is to reduce emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. The U.S. target from Kyoto in 1997 (but never ratified) was a 7% reduction on 1990 levels by 2010. Between 1990 and 2007 U.S. emissions increased by 16.8%, from 6.1 to 7.1 billion tonnes CO₂eq. So even if there is an agreement, for the U.S. it is weaker than Kyoto and does not take account of the "extra" greenhouse gasses emitted as a result of the failure to ratify and meet the earlier target.

The EU has not met its Kyoto target either. Its current plans are for a 20% reduction on 1990 levels by 2020, but up to half of these reductions can be offset by the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), whereby the financing of "low carbon" schemes in the global south can be construed as reducing emissions at home. The CDM has been shown all over the world to be utterly corrupt and tramples on the rights of local people in developing countries (*see www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/subject/climate/*).

EMISSION REDUCTIONS RESISTED

Behind the likely Copenhagen débacle lies the growing rivalry between the major capitalist powers, exacerbated by the global financial crisis, and the increasing economic clout of China, with its rapidly growing economy and large financial surplus. Thus, the EU's "commitments" on emissions reductions are conditional on there being a global deal that will prevent industries relocating to countries without carbon caps, while the U.S. Congress is considering placing import tariffs on products from nations that do not have emissions reduction targets.

Both the Chinese and Indian governments have taken the same position adopted by the previous Bush Administration in the USA. They will not reduce emissions, only the "carbon intensity" of their economies – the greenhouse gas emissions per unit of economic output. Over the medium to long term such reductions happen naturally, and have done since before James Watt improved steam engine efficiency from 1% to 3% in the 1770s. Since 1978, China's energy intensity has halved (and its consumption has tripled), so its target of another 20% intensity reduction in the next 5 years will probably be achieved. But it won't mean a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

RESPONSIBILITY AND REPARATIONS

There is agreement among socialists that the imperialist countries should acknowledge their responsibility for over 70% of historic greenhouse gas emissions. They should make "reparations" to developing countries for creating non-carbon technologies, as well as real commitments to drastically cut their emissions by 2050. Issues remain about how such aid is to be given, since the donors are a mendacious ruling class whose interest lies in maintaining their imperialist power, and the recipients a

mendacious ruling class whose members are mainly preoccupied with self-enrichment.

There has also been agreement that greenhouse gas emissions per capita should be equalised between all countries, while overall reductions ("Contraction and Convergence") also occur. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) calls for a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions of 80-95% on 1990 levels by 2050. Using 90%, that means reducing emissions from 4.3 tonnes of CO₂ (equivalent) to 0.43 tonnes per person, even assuming there is no population increase in that time.

According to estimates from the World Resources Institute, only 40 out of 185 countries would be allowed to increase their greenhouse gas emissions, 30 of them in Africa and Bangladesh, the one with the largest population. The U.S. would have to cut emissions by 98% and the U.K. by 95%. But most developing



economies would have to cut their emissions as well: China by 90%, India by 62%, South Africa by 94%, Iran by 93% and Brazil by 73%. Cuba also emits much more than this IPCC maximum target for 2050 and would need a reduction of 80% from its current emissions of 2.19 tonnes per person.

THE FIGHT FOR CARBON-FREE DEVELOPMENT

It is quite likely that the U.S., other imperialist countries and the media will use the failure of the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit to attack China in particular. This does not mean that the current trajectory of China's government, or that of other developing countries, should be immune from criticism from the left. Of course, supporters of the environmental and ecosocialist movement must concentrate on demanding that their own governments act against greenhouse gas emissions. But, just as we show solidarity with Chinese workers fighting the super-exploitation in the new industrial zones (mainly producing consumer goods for the "West"), or against the current state executions of Uighur protesters, we should also support those opposing environmental degradation and fighting for a carbon-free model of development.

WHAT THE LATEST SCIENCE TELLS US

There are currently thousands of environmental groups in China. Some have fought high profile campaigns, such as the ones against the Three Gorges Dam or the China River Diversion project. Others fight the increasing water and air pollution resulting from China's profit-driven economic growth. Sooner or later they will question the form of that growth and start to propose social, economic and political alternatives that are sustainable, just and egalitarian. Such alternatives will be easier to implement in a country whose infrastructure is not yet entirely built on an unsustainable basis.

The emission reduction target for 2050 set by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was calculated to give a more than even chance of preventing a 2°C rise in global temperatures. CO₂eq levels must not rise above 450 parts per million (ppm). The IPCC's climate models do not include feedback effects, such as greenhouse gas release from melting tundra, or loss of reflectivity as ice sheets melt.

Recently NASA climatologist James Hansen and colleagues examined past temperature and greenhouse gas records from ice cores. They calculated the heating effects of the greenhouse gas changes and the consequent feedback mechanisms, producing a remarkable correlation with the measured temperatures, going back 800,000 years. This showed that, at current greenhouse gas levels, because of a time lag in warming the oceans and melting of ice, we can already expect a further 2°C rise in temperatures. They concluded that to restore the earth's heat balance, CO₂ levels must be reduced from the current 385ppm to less than 350ppm.

Another group used the same ice cores to validate their estimates of atmospheric CO₂ from the shells of fossilised marine creatures, giving a record of the last 20 million years. They showed that present CO₂ levels were last as high about 15 million years ago. Temperatures were 3°C higher and sea levels 25 metres higher. These studies provide the rationale for the global campaign for 350ppm (350.org) that organised 5200 climate actions worldwide on 24 October.

In January James Hansen wrote to Barack Obama denouncing the "cap-and-trade" approach to emissions reductions, citing Japan's increasing coal use, offset by buying carbon credits from China. He called for a phasing out of coal power ("factories of death"), a carbon tax which is redistributed equally among taxpayers, punishing those with high carbon footprints, and "fourth generation nuclear power" that uses nuclear waste. **R**

Phil Ward is a member of Socialist Resistance.



Environmentalism as if Winning Mattered

Steve D’Arcy

Many people doubt that the environmental movement can actually defeat its adversaries and achieve its key aims. After all, it seems clear that winning would mean introducing sweeping social change and a new kind of sustainable and socially just economy. But the forces arrayed against this kind of change - including corporations, governments, and many affluent consumers hoping to boost their consumption levels in the years ahead - seem to represent too powerful a force to be overcome by a relatively small and seemingly powerless group of environmental activists.

These doubts about the capacity of environmentalists to win are confined neither to the movement’s self-serving and greed-motivated adversaries nor to the many indifferent bystanders who cast an equally skeptical eye on all attempts to make the world a better place. As it happens, many environmental activists themselves are no less convinced that failure is all but inevitable.

When this sort of pessimism overtakes environmentalists, they tend to adopt one of several familiar responses. First, there is the response of those who retreat from the movement altogether in favor of “lifestyle” environmentalism, replacing their former activism with “conscious” shopping. Second, there are those who reject activism as naïve compared to their own approach of apocalyptic “survivalism” which leads them to prepare for the day when civilization collapses, such as by stockpiling food or learning how to hunt and gather. A third group responds to the apparently bleak outlook for environmental activism not by leaving the movement, but by remaining active while seeking to cultivate friends in high places, linking arms with Big Business or the capitalist state in a mode of “mainstream” environmentalism that tries to promote “environmentally friendly” capitalism and “socially responsible” corporations. A fourth group also remains active, but replaces the aim of winning with the more readily attainable aim of making a moral statement, by serving as a “moral witness” or by “speaking truth to power.”

There is nothing to be gained by adopting a judgmental or holier-than-thou attitude toward people who adopt such responses. Why condemn such choices, which are all more or less understandable adaptations to the admittedly distressing predicament of contemporary environmentalism?

Nevertheless, we do need to see these stances for what they undoubtedly are: failures (in some cases) or refusals (in others) to develop a *strategy for winning*. Yet a strategy for winning is precisely what we need. The scale of the general environmental crisis is well known, and needs no special emphasis here: we are only too well-informed about the potentially catastrophic impact of plutogenic (caused-by-the-rich) climate change, the degrada-

tion of air quality, the erosion and poisoning of soil, the disappearance of forests and spreading of deserts, the despoliation of both fresh water sources and oceans, the historically unprecedented rates of species extinction, and so on. If nothing is done about any of this, it is not because there is any uncertainty about the gravity of these threats (notwithstanding cynical attempts by Big Business to fund “denial” research from “free market think tanks” to muddy the waters of public discussion).

Something *must* be done, clearly. And most people certainly *want* more to be done. Globally, according to a survey of world opinion in July 2009, the great majority of people regard their own governments as failing to take climate change (for example) as seriously as they should. According to Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org (which conducted the poll), “most people around the world appear to be impatient that their government is not doing enough to address the problem of climate change.” Indeed, “on average across all nations polled, 60 percent want climate change to get a higher priority, 12 percent want a lower priority.” Evidently, it is not a matter of needing to “change attitudes” or “educate the public.” If governments and corporations were reasonably responsive to public opinion, the prospects for implementing real change would be much more favorable for our side than they actually are at present. The widespread pessimism about the movement’s prospects for success is impossible to explain without relating it to a widely understood insight registered in another recent opinion poll. According to a 2009 Harris Poll, 85% of Americans believe that “Big companies” have “too much power and influence in Washington.” The same percentage of Americans believe that “political action committees that give money to political candidates” also have too much power and influence. Conversely, a full 76% of Americans believe that “public opinion” has “*too little* power and influence in Washington.” Americans, it seems, understand their political process rather better than many people give them credit for.

It should be clear, therefore, that we need a strategy for winning, and we need to develop it sooner rather than later. The approach that I pursue in this article will be to identify *strategic objectives* for weakening and ultimately defeating the adversaries that stand in the way of doing what science, morality, and common sense dictate *must* be done: transforming our destructive, unjust and unsustainable social order into a democratic, egalitarian and sustainable one.

A CIVIL SOCIETY STRATEGY

The strategy that I propose here is a *civil society strategy*. We need to distinguish, however, between two ways of thinking about

civil society in general, and the role that civil society can play in environmental activism in particular.

In recent democratic theory, the term “civil society” generally refers to the sphere or domain of *voluntary association*, in which *citizens organize themselves collectively*, yet in a manner that is independent of both the economy on the one hand and the state on the other. Thus, civil society fits into a fourfold picture of society, which distinguishes between (1) the *personal sphere* of intimate relations between friends, family, and neighbors; (2) the *economic sphere* of relations between employer and employee, corporations and customers, and so on; (3) the *state sphere* of relations between voters and public officials, encompassing state agencies, political parties that aspire to govern, the military and police, etc.; and (4) the *civil society sphere* of voluntary associations, including churches and other ‘worship’ communities, trade unions, public advocacy groups, popular mobilization organizations, community service projects, group affiliation organizations (like cultural clubs, bowling leagues, animal welfare associations), and so on.

Unfortunately, in the context of discussions about environmentalism, there is a tendency, among activists as well as academics, to equate civil society with *Non-Governmental Organizations* (NGOs), understood as formal organizations run by a paid staff, perhaps with a dues-paying but passive membership or a passive donor-base in the general public, such as the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, Environmental Defense Fund, and so on. But the first thing we need to do in order to develop a plausible civil society strategy for the environmental movement is to make a distinction between different sorts of civil society associations.

Besides formal NGOs with passive memberships (for which I will reserve the label “NGOs”), there are three other sorts of civil society associations that we need to take into account:

1. **Social Movement Organizations (SMOs):** As I use this term, these are *participatory* activist organizations (formal or informal), in which members/participants actively organize themselves, at the grassroots level, to engage in popular mobilization or public advocacy, as part of a social movement, such as the environmental movement, the disability rights movement, the feminist movement, or anti-racist movements.



2. **Class Conflict Organizations (CCOs):** The main example is trade unions. It is crucial to add, however, that rank-and-file caucuses *within* unions are also CCOs. But so are workers’ centres, living wage campaigns, and other working class struggle organizations, including many socialist and anarchist organizations (as long as they are not, or not mainly, oriented to campaigning in elections).

3. **Grassroots-Democratic Organizations (GDOs):** Here a key example is co-operatives (housing, retail, financial, and worker co-ops). But in some contexts, such as contemporary Venezuela, there are other types of GDOs, such as community councils. In several cities in Brazil, in Kerala, India, and other places, participatory budgeting popular assemblies are probably best described as GDOs, although in these cases there is a degree of integration with the state that makes them hard to classify as entirely within the realm of civil society. (Arguably, they represent a kind of *incursion* by civil society into a domain previously monopolized by state institutions. A similar point could be made about co-operatives vis-à-vis the market economy.)

From a political-strategic point of view, the difference between NGOs on the one hand and SMOs, CCOs, and GDOs on the other, is crucial. When I speak here of a *civil society strategy*, I am *not* talking about NGOs, but rather about SMOs, CCOs and GDOs. This is because, although I favor a non-statist strategy that rejects any and all attempts to find allies in the corporate class, I also reject the model of organizing that typifies (according to the way I use the term in this article) NGOs: the top-down model of an environmentalism-from-above, in which ordinary working people figure as donors or, at best, letter-writers, rather than active participants in a process of grassroots popular mobilization and self-organization.

By “civil society strategy,” then, I mean an approach to environmental movement-building that satisfies two criteria. First, it focuses on organizing for change within civil society, as opposed to the personal sphere (which lifestyle environmentalists and eco-survivalists prioritize), the economic sphere (which “green consumer,” “natural-capitalism” and “corporate social responsibility” advocates prioritize); or the state sphere (which mainstream lobbying NGOs and most Green Parties tend to prioritize). Second, within civil society it highlights, not top-down NGOs, but grassroots SMOs, CCOs, and GDOs as the key organizational vehicles for mounting a challenge to ecocidal capitalism and for constructing anticipatory post-capitalist alternatives that model sustainability and both social and environmental justice.

TWO PHASES

By definition, a strategy for winning will sketch out a path - a “line of march,” as they say - for getting us from where we now stand to where we need to be, if we are to win our struggle against our adversaries.

Because “where we need to be,” in this case, is in a *post-capitalist, democratic, sustainable, and socially just economy* (see Hahnel, “Protecting the Environment in a Participatory

Economy”), the path along which we need to move will involve breaking the resistance of an adversary that we know will remain, to the bitter end, implacably opposed to everything we are trying to accomplish: the giant corporations that dominate our economy as well as our political process. We have, therefore, a formidable opponent, with enormous resources of every sort, determined to fight against our efforts every step of the way. By comparison, we environmentalists are at the present time alarmingly weak and ill-prepared for the task of winning this fight (this in spite of the vast monetary resources at the disposal of the big NGOs that monopolize the public face of the movement but have no intention of mobilizing for a fight against Big Business).

How should we proceed? I propose that our movement should think about a strategy for winning as falling into two *phases*. The first phase – which I call the *resistance phase* – will be devoted to weakening our adversary and strengthening our own side. In the resistance phase, we will be able to fight effectively, to win political ‘battles’ in many cases, and always to lay the foundation for a future decisive victory. But we will not yet be ready to actually *win*. The second phase – which I call the *transition phase* – will only begin once we have successfully carried out the strategic objectives of the resistance phase, that is, after we have weakened the corporate class and its political representatives and strengthened our own forces to the point where a direct challenge to the hegemony and power of corporations will stand a realistic chance of succeeding. In the transition phase, we will not just be fighting a defensive struggle to resist the environmental havoc wreaked by corporate greed and capitalist maldevelopment; we will be launching a struggle to force – by mobilizing the social power of grassroots self-organization – a transition from capitalism to a sustainable, environmentally just post-capitalist economic democracy.

From these considerations it follows that a civil society strategy for the environmental movement will take the form of *two sets of strategic objectives*: first, *resistance objectives* which, when carried out, will so weaken the ecocidal ruling class as to make a direct grassroots challenge to its power possible; and second, *transition objectives* which, when carried out, will launch us on the path toward a building a new society.

THE RESISTANCE PHASE

The strategic objectives of the resistance phase are each to be pursued simultaneously. There are four of them:

1. To build **cost-raising protest movements** against all forms of environmental destruction, framing these struggles whenever possible as struggles for *environmental justice* and/or for prioritizing *the public interest over corporate profits*;
2. To construct an **anti-corporate labour/community/environmental alliance** at the *grassroots* level;
3. To create and support anticipatory **community-based alternatives** to capitalist production that model *sustainability* and *environmental justice*;

4. To (re-)establish **vital currents of ecologically oriented anti-capitalist radicalism** (eco-socialism, social ecology, parecon/parsoc, etc.).

I will say a few things about each of these objectives in turn.

Cost-raising Environmental Justice Protest Movements

The first resistance-phase strategic objective is to build cost-raising protest movements against all forms of environmental destruction, framing these struggles whenever possible as struggles for environmental justice and/or for prioritizing the public interest over corporate profits. To explain this objective, I need to explain (a) the idea of a cost-raising movement, and (b) the rationale for a focus on justice and people-over-profits.

A key assumption upon which the civil society strategy is based is that governments and corporations are *not* responsive to moral principles, to arguments about the public interest or what is best “for our grandchildren,” or to appeals to reasonableness and common sense. Instead, governments and corporations are *interest-motivated* institutions. That is to say, they act almost entirely based on cost/benefit analysis, factoring in not the public interest but the interests of the elites who rule these institutions. This insight has to inform how we “do activism.”

If corporations and their political representatives in the capitalist state are interest-motivated, and base their behavior on cost/benefit calculations, then we can explain their unwillingness to allow constraints on their environmentally destructive policies and practices as a side-effect of the fact that they *benefit from* their freedom to destroy the planet, and that it would be *costly* to them if they were no longer allowed to exploit and despoil the Earth.

If that analysis is basically correct, which few can seriously doubt, then something should follow about the kind of strategy we ought to adopt in trying (in the short term) to challenge their behavior and defend the planet and its occupants from the ecocidal effects of capitalist production and accumulation: *if we want them to stop, we have to change the balance of costs versus benefits, until destroying the Earth is more costly than refraining from doing so.*

That is the basic idea of a cost-raising movement: we inflict penalties on the rich in response to plutogenic environmental injustice and destruction, in order to change the cost/benefit calculations of elites, until they change their behavior (while recognizing that there are limits to how successful this effort can be as long as the economy remains profit-driven and undemocratic).

How can we raise the costs of environmental destruction? One way is to impose monetary penalties. If we know anything, we know that capitalist elites are responsive to monetary incentives. This is well understood by today’s environmentalists, even when their politics are in other respects quite weak (e.g., PETA). It is the premise behind boycotting tactics, which are widespread, and also eco-sabotage, which is less widely practiced but quite high-profile and also well understood.

A less obvious, but ultimately more effective form of cost-raising occurs when a movement threatens, not just particular monetary losses, but the reproduction of the privileged social position of Big Business itself. Ideally, this should be our aim in building an environmental protest movement.

If the environmental movement can convince corporations that popular opposition to the environmental destructiveness of Big Business is driving large numbers of workers, students, poor and unemployed people to begin to question, not just the particular actions of individual companies, but the dominance of corporate power itself, then the movement will have a real capacity to intimidate corporations into at least limited forms of compliance with the imperatives of sustainability and environmental justice.

Because the corporate elite will never change its behavior by the force of rational arguments, our capacity as activists to influence their decision-making is always indirect: by creating a level of dissent, both wide enough (encompassing masses of people) and deep enough (opposing not just a particular policy, but the whole corporate agenda and the corporate power structure that imposes that agenda), that the corporate elite has grounds to worry that its position of unquestioned privilege and societal ‘hegemony’ or leadership is being placed in jeopardy by the environmentally destructive behavior that is fuelling this dissent.

So, a cost-raising protest movement would aim, *first*, to mobilize and politicize masses of workers and students, poor and unemployed people, women and communities of colour, to speak out and protest against environmental injustice. *Second*, it would seek to educate and ultimately radicalize those politicizing people by demonstrating to them that the destruction of the Earth is being propelled by the greed of corporations and the servility of the state in relation to those corporate interests. And, *third*, as the movement grew and more people begin to turn against the corporate agenda and develop a willingness to oppose it and demand that governments refuse to serve it, the movement would aim to force some corporations and governments to make significant concessions to the movement, out of elite fears that their privileges are threatened by the growing and deepening opposition to corporate power being fuelled by a popular backlash against environmental injustice and destruction.

But why the focus on “environmental justice” and “prioritizing people over corporate profits”? Why not focus on fostering a new “deep ecological” consciousness or a post-productivist “paradigm shift,” etc.?

There are multiple reasons, from an intellectual point of view. But, from a strategic point of view (which is the crucial one here), it needs to be underlined that a focus on environmental injustice and people-over-profits is a necessary part of a larger emphasis, which is built into the civil society strategy, on *popular mobilization* and the building of an anti-corporate alliance. Talk of a movement that would be “neither left nor right,” that would be based on some kind of expanded ethical consciousness or a “neo-primitivist” repudiation of modernity, or any of the multitude of “consciousness-raising” forms of environmentalism, *rather than a*

clear-eyed focus on defeating Big Business as the key enemy of the environmental movement, will only lead us down the road to defeat. We are seeking, on the contrary, a strategy for winning. And a focus on fomenting popular indignation against the corporate elite is crucial for any plausible strategy for winning.

Moreover, the environmental justice movement is founded on a moral as well as a strategic insight: morally, we ought to be clear that environmental destruction does disproportionately affect people who are subjected to socially organized disadvantage (such as Indigenous people, workers, the poor, racialized groups, women, most people in the global South); and strategically, we have good reason to use this injustice to help channel and mobilize popular anger in constructing an anti-corporate alliance between social justice movements, labour movements, and environmental movements.

A Grassroots Labour/Community/Environmental Alliance

The second resistance-phase strategic objective is to construct an anti-corporate labour/community/environmental alliance at the grassroots level. This is not so much a separate objective in relation to the first, but rather a way of thinking about the forces we need to unite in the course of building an effective environmental protest movement that is willing and able to confront corporate power.

As part of a civil society strategy, this objective has to be distinguished from a superficially similar strategy, sometimes called a “blue/green alliance” or “labour/environmental alliance” strategy or a “turtles-and-teamsters” strategy, which is almost always understood to be (or at least practiced as) a top-down approach in which union presidents meet with NGO executive directors to plot a joint legislative lobbying agenda (see bluegreenalliance.org and apolloalliance.org). This extends all of the weaknesses of NGO-orchestrated spectator-activism into the workers’ movement, and the civil society strategy entirely rejects this approach. True, unions are CCOs, not NGOs, in the sense I give to these terms. But *in their capacity as government lobbying groups*, which is the aspect of unions that are front-and-centre in most high-level “blue/green alliance” efforts, unions actually function much more like NGOs, notably in the sense that their members figure in these projects as passive dues-payers rather than as active participants. By contrast, the civil society strategy proposes to develop forms of grassroots self-organization, not to build alliances between various top-down organizations hoping to bolster their bargaining power when lobbying politicians. One consequence of this is that I don’t mean to single out *unions* as such, but rather working class organizations, including groups organizing living wage campaigns, campaigns against sexual harassment of women in the workplace, solidarity campaigns with workers other parts of the world, and so on. Unions are important in all of this, of course, but so are other expressions of working-class self-organization.

Note also that I am talking about a labour/*community*/environmental alliance, not just a labour/environmental alliance. The reason is simple: the labour movement and the environmental

movement need each other, to maximize their anti-corporate mobilizing capacity, but both of those movements *also* need to align themselves with grassroots efforts in the feminist movement and the anti-racist movement, with anti-poverty movements and with Indigenous movements. In the absence of this *broader community* orientation, the labour and environmental movements will be undermined internally, because they will not be challenged to respond effectively to the grievances of many exploited and oppressed people in the wider society, and they will be undermined externally, because their mobilizing capacity will be more limited.

Building a labour/community/environmental alliance against Big Business will be difficult, even though important work on this front has already been done over a period of decades. We are not starting from scratch by any means, but neither can we rest content with things as they stand today. In building on the work of previous generations, we need to cling to the basic principle of all solidarity-building: to remember that *an injury to one is an injury to all*. This means that the grievances and aspirations of all groups in this alliance – women, Indigenous peoples, poor people, people of colour, workers, environmentalists, and so on – need to be taken seriously and given prominence and weight in the decisions and actions of *all* the other groups. For environmentalists, this means cultivating a *feminist* environmentalism, a *class-struggle* environmentalism, a *poor-people's* environmentalism, an *anti-imperialist* environmentalism, and so on. For this reason, as for others, the framework of *environmental justice* is crucial for building our movement into an effective anti-corporate force.

One final point. The labour movement can be an unusually difficult ally for environmentalists (and, sometimes, vice versa), because unions tend to have a bias in favour of protecting present-day employment sources, even if those employment sources are unsustainable and violate principles of environmental justice. Why bother working to strengthen such an alliance? The answer is clear: unions, and other working class organizations, are especially strategically important for all anti-corporate social change movements because it is the working class that has, uniquely, the capacity to deal the most crushing blows to capitalist production: to shut down workplaces. In the absence of an effective and longstanding alliance between working class organizations and environmental organizations, it is simply inconceivable that the environmental movement can win.

The demand for *free retraining* and “green-job” *employment guarantees* (in unionized jobs) for workers displaced by environmental progress must be front and centre in all the discussions and actions undertaken by environmentalists.

Sustainable Community-based Alternatives

The third resistance-phase strategic objective is to create and support anticipatory community-based alternatives to capitalist production that model sustainability and environmental justice;

Protest, surely, is not enough. In part because of the discrediting of earlier Left social reform projects (the statist bureaucratic planning economies of countries like the USSR, the welfare-state

bureaucratism of European social-democracy), it is crucial that the environmental movement give serious attention to pursuing a “build-it-now” strategy, constructing non-capitalist, sustainable production and distribution vehicles before the defeat of capitalism. In order to position our movement as offering a credible and viable alternative to capitalism, we need to draw people out of their immersion in and dependence on the capitalist mode of production and draw them into “counter-capitalist” alternatives that model sustainability and environmental justice.

It is worth recalling that, when the socialist Left in Europe was (arguably) at its strongest, in the years prior to World War I, it had been an entrenched, taken-for-granted feature of socialist strategy to build a strong co-operative movement, with close ties to both unions and socialist organizations. In general, and with many important exceptions, neither the socialist Left nor the environmental movement has given enough attention to building this kind of counter-economy in recent decades. Nevertheless, the “social” or “solidarity” economy of co-operatives and other non-profit, grassroots, egalitarian, and non-statist forms of community-based economic democracy is in many ways thriving. It consists of an array of counter-capitalist institutions such as food retail co-ops, community gardening and urban farming co-operatives, local participatory budgeting processes, ecologically responsible worker co-ops, transnational grassroots fair trade arrangements, and experiments in participatory economics. And it already has broad appeal and deep roots in many communities in most countries. Building this sector, and encouraging it to evolve in the direction of a class-struggle, environmental justice orientation, must be made central to the struggle for a sustainable post-capitalist social order.

Vital Currents of Ecological Anti-Capitalism

The fourth and final resistance-phase strategic objective singled out by the civil society strategy is to establish, or re-establish, vital currents of *ecologically oriented anti-capitalist radicalism*.

It is no secret that anti-capitalist radicalism in North America has been in decline since the 1970s. But it should be equally clear that a strategy for winning for the environmental movement will need to be able to draw on a strong anti-capitalist Left as a source of analysis, strategy, and vision. Ultimately, to take up the task of winning, environmentalists will have to merge with anti-capitalists. This merger will require a double transformation: the anti-capitalist Left will have to move toward an ecologically informed critique of capitalism, and environmentalists will have to move toward an anti-capitalist interpretation of ecology.

This double shift has been underway for decades. Social ecology, which emerged from the anarchist Left, was one pioneering political current promoting this convergence. More recently, eco-socialism and ecological democracy have emerged from the Marxist Left to give further impetus to this process. Meanwhile, an anti-corporate sensibility has taken firm root in much of the environmental movement, especially among environmental justice activists, even if the grotesque alliances with Big Business undertaken by some high-profile, well-funded establishment NGOs

have obscured the strong and growing rift between environmentalists and bosses that exists at the grassroots level.

Many will be tempted, in a predictable way, to think of fostering currents of anti-capitalist radicalism as a task best pursued in small membership organizations or ‘sects’ that promote the Correct Program, as interpreted by the group’s founders. A civil society approach proceeds differently, by means of a proliferation of “political centers” (to use Hal Draper’s term). Political centers are not membership organizations but publishing and propagation projects that cultivate the emergence and consolidation of identifiable political currents (social ecology, eco-socialism, parecon/parsoc, etc.), while allowing these currents to maintain ongoing dialogue with a wide array of activists, not just actual or potential joiners of a membership organization. Some examples of political centres would be: ZNet/Z Magazine, *Monthly Review*, the Eco-socialist International Network, the Institute for Social Ecology, and so on. Creating political centers instead of programmatically uniform membership organizations sets up a healthier dynamic and draws the Left away from zero-sum competition for members and toward a healthy ongoing debate among comrades who see things differently and want to make their case to each other without reifying differences into organizational boundaries that divide activists unnecessarily.

Part of rebuilding a strong anti-capitalist Left, which can play a key role in bolstering and radicalizing the environmental movement, is working to create “two, three, many” political centers or currents of ecologically informed anti-capitalist radicalism, each of which can attempt to make a real contribution to moving our struggles forward, but none of which can credibly claim to monopolize insight or to be the voice of the movement.

THE TRANSITION PHASE

Once the strategic objectives of the resistance phase are carried out, the situation of the environmental movement will be radically transformed. Instead of being a relatively weak and badly positioned movement, despairing at its incapacity to defeat a formidable adversary, it will find itself in a position of relative strength, backed by (1) powerful environmental-justice protest movements, (2) a strong anti-corporate alliance between working class organizations and environmental SMOs, (3) an array of

healthy and well-functioning counter-capitalist alternative economic institutions comprising an egalitarian, sustainable and democratic prefiguration of a post-capitalist future, and (4) a resurgence of anti-capitalist radical currents, which would now be informed by an ecological awareness largely missing from the radical politics of the past.

The once-mighty ruling class, meanwhile, would be everywhere on the defensive: fighting off the demands of mass protests; its waning hegemony challenged by a powerful anti-corporate alliance; discredited by the visibility of viable alternatives to profit-motivated production; and locked in an ideological struggle against the growing influence of radical anti-capitalist environmental vision and analysis.

From such a position of strength, the environmental movement could finally take up directly the task of imposing defeat on its adversary. Specifying strategic objectives for a transition struggle is, necessarily, more speculative in a time like the present, when transition tasks are not on our agenda. But, reflecting on struggles taking place in countries like Venezuela, and factoring in what can be learnt from a study of upsurges of mass radical action in earlier decades, it is possible to sketch a few key objectives that can give content to the idea of a “transition phase” of the struggle to defeat capitalism and launch the project of constructing a just and sustainable post-capitalist economic democracy

Somewhat schematically, I would propose that we think of the *transition phase* as having four strategic objectives to carry out:

1. To organize anti-capitalist environmentalists into a **common front** of radical community organizations (SMOs, CCOs, GDOs), capable of tactical concentration for united action;
2. To establish **the hegemony of the anti-capitalist common front** within the mass environmental movement, so that it exercises a consensual, acknowledged leadership role in pointing the way forward for the broader movement;
3. To gain for the common front and its allies a degree of community-based “social” power, resting on the capacity to deploy general strikes, mass protest, and mass civil disobedience campaigns, on such a scale that the community-based opposition constitutes **a community-based counter-power** that can effectively challenge the economic power of corporations and the coercive power of the state;
4. To secure **the transfer of ever more extensive governance functions to community-based self-organization** (SMOs, CCOs, GDOs in civil society), ultimately displacing – rapidly whenever possible, gradually whenever necessary – both “private” and “state” sector institutions from their role in running the economy, the healthcare and education systems, providing social services, etc.

The first three of these transition-phase strategic objectives could be carried out simultaneously, and over a period of years. The fourth transition objective could be *pursued* simultaneously



with the others, but only *completed* at the culmination of the whole strategic project, by actually breaking once and for all the resistance of Big Business, and embarking on the construction of a sustainable, socially just post-capitalist social order, based on community organizations (“councils”) in workplaces and neighborhoods.

I will say a little bit about each of these transition objectives.

A Common Front

The first transition-phase strategic objective of the civil society strategy is to organize anti-capitalist environmentalists into a *common front* of radical community organizations (SMOs, CCOs, GDOs), capable of tactical concentration or unity in action.

Note two points about this proposal. First, it is not a political party. It is, above all, not a party aiming to win state power, whether by means of elections or in some other way. On the contrary, it is an organized formal alliance of multiple grassroots civil society organizations, with a mass constituency rooted in neighborhoods, communities, and workplaces. Second, however, note that the common front proposed here *is* something that can do some of the things that party-building advocates rightly regard as strategically necessary for defeating Big Business. It can coordinate tactical concentration: united action by the anti-capitalist opposition to challenge corporations and the state, and ultimately attempt to defeat them once and for all. And it can serve as an organized vehicle for the radical, activist wing of the wider movement to make its case to the general public for militant and decisive struggle against Big Business and the capitalist state.

The precise form to be taken by a common front of this kind will have to be worked out by activists attempting to actually build it, in the context of a strong mass movement with influential ecological anti-capitalist currents (conditions that do not now exist in North America). The only point upon which a civil society strategy insists is that it be an organization for popular mobilization, public advocacy and other forms of grassroots self-activity, as distinct from a political party attempting to win elections or install itself atop the capitalist state.

Anti-capitalist Hegemony

The third transition-stage strategic objective of the civil society strategy is to establish the hegemony, or acknowledged leadership role, of the anti-capitalist common front, within the mass environmental movement.

As always, the reason for adopting a strategic objective is that it seems like a necessary element of a strategy for winning. If the environmental movement is to be successful, then it will have to come to pass, eventually, and as soon as possible, that the radical, anti-capitalist wing of the movement, which promotes a real challenge to the rule of Big Business, and which is committed to fighting for sweeping social change, will find itself increasingly acknowledged by the mass base of the movement as the force that has the right approach to pushing the movement forward.

Today, of course, this is far from being the case. But it would be fruitless to try to conceive of a strategy for winning against Big Business that doesn't envision a situation – probably a time of profound social crisis – in which the anti-capitalist wing of the movement emerges as the acknowledged leadership of the struggle.

Of course, here we need to ward off possible misunderstanding. By saying that the anti-capitalist wing of the movement, as organized into the common front of radical SMOs, CCOs, and GDOs, has to emerge as the acknowledged leadership of the broader movement, I do not mean that it should exercise *authority* over the movement or make decisions on its behalf. I mean that it must be able to count on broad mass support from the wider movement, so that if the common front calls for a general strike, workers actually go out, and if it calls for mass civil disobedience, then masses of people take up the call. This is not a matter of authority; it is a matter of the most advanced and militant sector of the movement forging a consensus within the wider movement in support of a certain line of march, which masses of people ‘buy into’ as representing the most compelling proposal for how to move the struggle forward during a time of crisis.

A Community-based Counter-power

The third transition-phase strategic objective of the civil society strategy is to gain for the common front and its allies a degree of community-based “social” power, resting on the capacity to deploy general strikes, mass protest, and mass civil disobedience campaigns, on a scale that can effectively challenge the economic power of corporations and the coercive power of the state.

We know where corporations get their power – they control the means of production; and we know where the capitalist state gets its power – it has a monopoly of legal coercive force; but we need to be equally clear where the environmental movement gets *its* power. Environmentalism's strength, and therefore its capacity to win, depends crucially upon its capacity to exercise a kind of power that is neither economic nor political but *social*, that is, it is the community-based power of grassroots self-organization within civil society. In short, its power resides in the organizational capacities of social movement organizations, class conflict organizations, and grassroots democratic organizations.

A strategy for winning, therefore, must include a strategy for building up the social power of the movement to such a degree that it can actually *rival* the degree of power that corporations and their political underlings in the capitalist state can *jointly* muster. It is a tall order. But we know from the history of revolutionary movements that, under the right conditions, when an emboldened and militant mass movement confronts a weakened and ineffective ruling elite, the social power of mass movements *can* topple regimes and institute sweeping social change. That is just a plain fact of modern history. If all four of the resistance-phase strategic objectives have been successfully secured, the environmental movement will be rather well-positioned to begin building up this kind of social power.

The way to do it, though, is not in the usual way that social power is built up, which is by building grassroots organizations that collectively address people's needs and advance their aims. Instead, building up the kind of power needed to challenge the ruling elites of capitalist society directly will require that the strongest weapons in the arsenal (so to speak) of civil society: general strikes, militant mass demonstrations, and mass campaigns of civil disobedience. These tactics, when supported not just by small and isolated groups (as is often so today), but by a broad and powerful mass movement that is unwilling to take 'No' for an answer, can generate vast concentrations of social power, certainly enough (when the circumstances are favorable) to rival the power of a compromised, weakened ruling class.

Transferring Public Authority to Community Organizations

The fourth transition-phase strategic objective of the civil society strategy, and the one that more than any other gives content to the aim of "winning," is the objective of securing the transfer of ever more extensive governance functions (including running the economy, the healthcare and education systems, providing social services, etc.) from "private" and "state" sector institutions to the "social" sector of community-based self-organization (i.e., to civil society SMOs, CCOs, GDOs).

To *complete* this transfer would be, in and of itself, to have defeated capitalism (but not necessarily to have consolidated a coherent and well-functioning alternative, which presumably may take time). But there is no reason to delay this work until we reach the climax or the end-point of the struggle against the rule of Big Business. In principle, it can begin today. Clearly, though, in the transition phase of the movement, when the community-based Left is very strong and the ruling class is weak, it will be an especially opportune time for civil society to try to wrench governance functions away from corporations and the state.

In each case, when a governance function is captured by grassroots self-organization and taken over by civil society, a key task will obviously be to reconfigure these functions (economic, administrative, technical, pedagogical, medical, etc.) in ways that are consistent with our core values and ultimate aims, namely, political and economic democracy, social and environmental justice, and ecological sustainability. This, of course, will be a continuation of work being done throughout the resistance phase (see the 3rd resistance-phase strategic objective).

One question that arises in this connection is whether we should think of this transition – this transfer of governance functions from the hierarchical and authoritarian institutions of capitalism (corporations and the state) to the egalitarian and democratic institutions of a radicalized grassroots civil society – as taking place *gradually*, emerging (through struggle) over a period of many years, or *abruptly*, by means of a relatively brief revolutionary process. Both scenarios have an element of plausibility to them. However, it is just common sense to acknowledge that those periods which witness sudden upsurges of civic en-

agement, in which popular participation in public affairs is both more widespread than usual and takes more insistent forms than usual, and which we call "*revolutions*," are golden opportunities to be seized upon to push the transition process as far as it can possibly go. In that sense, the civil society strategy is clearly a *revolutionary* strategy. But there is no reason to *wait* for such an upsurge before beginning to undertake the transition, nor is there any reason to *cease* struggling for still more far-reaching change after a revolutionary upsurge has died down. This opportunity-driven approach to revolutionary transition – gradual transformation whenever necessary, rapid transformations whenever possible – seems to be the approach of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, which is as good a model as we have before us today (in spite of the well-known limitations of its approach to sustainability issues and more extensive use of the state than a civil society strategy would encourage).

CONCLUSION

The civil society strategy is designed to offer what many approaches to environmental activism stop short of proposing: a strategy for winning.

It is distinctive for two main reasons. First, it looks neither to the personal sphere, nor to the economic sphere, nor to the political sphere, but instead to the associational sphere of civil society as the key *locus* for building a powerful movement for challenging corporate power and constructing a sustainable and environmentally just alternative. Second, within civil society, it looks *not* to the high-profile and well-funded environmental NGOs as key agents for organizing collective action, but instead to the social movement organizations, class-conflict organizations and grassroots democratic organizations that serve as the primary vehicles for the self-organization of grassroots activism in the environmental movement and in other struggles for political and economic democracy and for social and environmental justice. **R**

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ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: RACE, DISPLACEMENT AND LAND?

No One is Illegal-Vancouver

In light of the devastating reality of environmental destruction globally, there is an urgent and critical need to expose the root causes of environmental injustice as stemming from systems of domination. Predatory capitalist expansion and imperialist militarization has devastated the lands, resources, and communities of primarily people of colour locally and globally. Toxic industries are largely located on Indigenous lands and closest to people of colour communities. While people of colour communities are disproportionately victims of environmental degradation, they are often scapegoated as responsible for the environmental crisis and excluded from the leadership of the environmental movement.

COLONIZATION AS ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION

Environmental degradation, with climate change as one obvious manifestation, is intimately linked to the forced displacement and migration of people. By the year 2050, an estimated one billion people will be displaced from their homes because of global warming and stated-sponsored climate terrorism.

Populations of the global South and indigenous communities in the North have been ravaged by centuries of colonial-corporate theft and environmentally-destructive “development.” Colonization brought with it not only the displacement and genocide of peoples across the world but also an exploitative view of the natural world. Early colonial imagery of nature presented it as something to be tamed, conquered and exploited; in the same way that indigenous peoples were.

The colonial project centred on gaining access to natural resources in order to fuel the growing capitalist industry. This continues today.

For example the top five mining companies of the world are run out of the U.K., Australia, Canada, Switzerland and the USA (with many of their headquarters in Vancouver). The mining industry is responsible for causing severe environmental devastation including loss of food supplies, flooding of entire communities, releasing lethal concentrations of acid into water supplies, and displacing millions of people.

Other industries such as fishing, cattle and dairy, farming, oil, and lumber are also responsible for displacement, the destruction of entire ecosystems, emission of toxic substances, and intensifying deadly natural disasters such as landslides, hurricanes and floods.

Within displaced populations, indigenous people – particularly women and children – are the most affected as their resources for survival, such as subsistence farming and hunting, rapidly disappear and they are driven to urban slums or refugee camps. For example in Canada, the Inuit who have lived harmoniously with nature in the Arctic North, are now facing reduction of their stocks of walrus, seals, and whales, and erosion of their coastline. In Mexico, farmers struggle to grow food as highly subsidized U.S. corn is dumped into their economy.

Yet the colonial and racist underpinnings of the nation-state system, is quickly revealed by the lack of response of those states who in reality have the most resources (as a result of theft) to protect environmental refugees. Indeed, these people are not even legally recognized as refugees. The borders of Western countries have remained tightly guarded against refugees of all stripes, and particularly so against those who have been displaced by environmental destruction.

This is despite the fact that such states hold the most responsibility for the global environmental crisis and hence the creation of soaring numbers of environmental refugees. For example, Australia, which has one of the highest rates of carbon emissions per capita in the world, refuses to open its borders to citizens of Tuvalu, a Polynesian island facing catastrophe from rising sea levels.

Racialized peoples in the First World are also victimized by this ideology, as witnessed in the handling of Hurricane Katrina. Most disgustingly, Katrina facilitated the government’s injection of funding into compliant NGOs to legitimize the current world order under the veneer of charity and awarded corporate contracts for “reconstruction.” Katrina made clear that beyond state lines, we are still thoroughly crisscrossed by borders of race, language, religion, gender, class, age, ability, sexual identity – borders continue to be socially, politically, culturally and violently enforced to divide us and discipline us into believing that some lives are worth less than others.



GREENING OF HATE

Unfortunately within the environmental movement, we have seen a rise in the “greening of hate.” This ideology blames environmental degradation on poor populations of colour.

For example, the rhetoric of governments and many environmental organizations in the North place the blame of excessive CO2 and other pollutants on countries from the South such as India and China. This is done in order to shift the blame from the real culprits to those countries that have been exploited by the imperialist project for centuries. In reality, much of China's pollution is generated by the North's demand for cheap manufactured goods. Approximately 30% of industry in China is foreign-owned by companies such as Wal-Mart. And, greenhouse gas emissions are 1.2 tonnes per capita in India compared with 23 tonnes in the U.S. and 18 tonnes in Canada.

Within the Western world, certain environmental movements propose restricting immigration in order to control population growth. The most well known example of the pervasive nature of such discourse is in the 1990s when a large anti-immigrant bloc within the Sierra Club pushed for a ballot initiative supporting a reduction of net immigration as part of a "comprehensive population policy."

In addition to promoting racism, such measures obscure the reality that the fundamental cause of environmental degradation is not overpopulation of the Earth by humans but overpopulation of the Earth by pillaging state and corporate interests! While policing borders, such measures regulate women's reproductive choice by blaming women – predominantly poor indigenous and racialized women – for having too many children.

One of the most significant ways in which racism is perpetuated within the environmental movement is the invisibility and marginalization of those most directly affected by environmental degradation. Indeed, in stereotypic fashion the environmental movement often traces its origins to the efforts of visionary white men to protect the natural world from industrialization, rather than acknowledging the historic ties that most people of colour communities globally have had to the natural world. They readily ignore the wealth of traditional knowledge that land-based peoples have on how to live harmoniously with the land and how to appropriately steward the land.

The mainstream environmental movement has also perpetuated a mythology of the environment as separate from humans (the man vs nature myth).

In Canada this has often meant the pitting of indigenous peoples against environmentalists as environmentalists become complicit in the displacement of indigenous peoples in order to support "conservation efforts" that ignores the ways in which indigenous peoples relate to the land. For example anti-fur activists do not recognize that non-commercial trapping is one of the main sources of livelihood for indigenous peoples in the North.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND CAPITALISM

The ideology that capitalism and colonialism can co-exist with genuine social and environmental justice is disproven when

we recognize that it is a social, economic and political system that is fundamentally and necessarily rooted in exploitation and expansion.

Sustainable development and creation of "green industries" within capitalism continues to remain heavily resource-extractive and costing the lives of millions of people. The production of bio-fuel, for instance, is directly linked to the food crisis in the global South.

We reject the developmentalist framework that guides so much of economic policy, including in Third World states. While the impoverishment and destabilization of the Third World has been one of the primary consequences of First World imperialism, so is the imposition of an environmentally-destructive capitalist social organization (a.k.a. "liberal democracy") in the Third World.

Such development is not designed to alleviate the poverty and inequality of the Third World vis-à-vis the First World. It is designed to give corporations access to land, natural resources and cheap labour; to grant power to the state to police and regulate human beings as economic units and Mother Earth as a commodity; and to alienate people from their connections to the Earth, to themselves and to each other.

It is absolutely not meant to develop people's ability to build self-sufficient and self-determining communities in harmony – indeed in reverence – of that which gives us life and sustains us day by day, the Earth itself.

CONCLUSION

In our struggles for social and environmental justice, we must insist on striving for a holistic understanding of issues and the complex ways in which they are interconnected; it is this understanding that must ground our visions for the future.

We demand that residency status be given to all migrants who have been displaced by environmental destruction. We are speaking especially to First World states that have through violence and exploitation reaped the most benefits from – and therefore bear the most responsibility for – the pillage of our earth.

We believe that indigenous women must be placed at the centre of the environmental movement as they are the most impacted by environmental degradation and they also possess generations of knowledge on how to protect the Earth.

We desire a world where people can move freely and no one is forcibly displaced. We envision a future of joyful and truly sustainable communities that are held together not by domination, but by a deep connection to each other and to the Earth. **R**

No One is Illegal-Vancouver – noii-van.resist.ca.

100 Years of Colombian Trade Unionism: Battles & Bloodshed

Daniel Hawkins

The ascendance to the Colombian Presidency of Álvaro Uribe Vélez in May 2002, on the back of a fiery, iron-fisted rhetoric of State war against the country's leftist, insurgent guerrilla groups (FARC and ELN), set the stage for a dramatic upscaling in State-conducted and patronized violence against, not only guerrilla groups, but all left-leaning movements of social opposition, with trade unionists retaining their unenviable position as one of the prime targets of State and right-wing paramilitary-narco-trafficking group persecution.

Being a trade unionist in Colombia has a long history of personal risk and social stigma, with State-led massacres of defiant workers littering the scenes of union-worker struggles at pivotal points during the 20th century. The 1928 army massacre of between 1000-1500 protesting, United Fruit Company, workers in the tropical, Magdalena region of the country, left an indelible, bloody mark, on the trajectory of union-State-big business relations for decades following, demonstrating that in the context of a civil-war ravaged country that was ethnically-diverse and topographically divided, capitalist development would require the unwavering stick of State violence to support the interests of the local oligarchy and multinational capital in their quests to reap riches. Yet, in terms of systematic political, economic and social repression of trade unionism, the post 1986 era inaugurated an unprecedented turn in anti-unionism.

This year (2009) marks 100 hundred years of Colombian trade unionism. Given this history, it is worthwhile tracing the structures grounding this two-decades-long reconfiguration in the Colombian labour-capital-State relations. And in particular to analyse the notorious turn that has come about since the election of Álvaro Uribe Vélez as Colombian President, and his historic campaign to militarily batter the leftist-insurgent guerrilla groups (FARC and ELN) that have withstood decades of assault from the Colombian army and its U.S. collaborators, and foment the path of capitalist investment in the country. For Uribe, Colombian history is divided into two moments: the pre-Uribe 2002 era, and thereafter,¹ and this discourse is repeated continuously by himself and his entourage of ministerial puppets in public forums, both domestic and international. For the Colombian trade union movement, such a discourse has clear resonance, although for much different reasons than those communicated by the President.

The founding of Colombia's largest trade union confederation, *La Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), coincided with the State-led "dirty war" against leading leftist politicians,² most particularly the FARC-based political party, *La Unión Patriótica*

(UP),³ and CUT's campaign to extend the trade union struggle to a wider social sector, leading mobilizations for the respect of life and the acknowledgement of labour rights⁴ brought it into direct firing line from the ultra-conservative, politico-economic forces governing the country. From thereon after, implicit political exclusion of organized labour turned into systematic annihilation of unionists. Indeed, since 1986, Colombia has been the world leader in unionist assassinations, with 2,694 murders, as of March 2009. But more than such massive numbers of murders, in the same period, Colombian trade unionists have suffered 9,911 acts of violence, 231 of which were attempted murders, 193 cases of forced disappearance, and 4,200 death threats.⁵ Indeed, being a trade unionist in Colombia entails risks and requires a resilient class identity and courage not found anywhere else in the world. Such anti-unionist repression has continued, quantitatively, in the seven years since Uribe emerged onto the national realm of executive power, with 482 trade unionists being murdered, despite the plight of Colombian unionists ambling tentatively into the international spotlight as the principle "sticky point" in the U.S. Congressional ratification of the U.S.-Colombian Free-Trade Agreement; a project held-up as one of Uribe's principal political goals. Nevertheless, qualitatively, the anti-union strategy has had a consummate makeover, in an effort to placate the demands made by a minority of publicly-outspoken U.S. democratic senators and congressional representatives, while not offering any systematic change in State policy vis-à-vis workers' organizations. Indeed, the new "publicity" tactic has moved toward the realm of statistics whereby public "truths" assume the thin veneer of social reality.

In an effort to reduce the murder rates of trade unionists, the Uribe Government, has adopted a two-tiered policy of, firstly, reneging the juridical existence of established trade unions, and secondly, redefining who is and who is not a trade unionist. The rate of trade union membership in Colombia is an abysmal 4 percent, one of the lowest of the Latin American region. Such a dismal union standing, in terms of numbers, is heavily influenced by the anti-union legislative regime in Colombia; of the 18,749,836 workers in the country, less than 3 million are allowed membership in a trade union, as the antiquated law states that only employees that labour under a work contract can be affiliated to a union (regulated by The Sustantive Work Code of 1950-CST). But normative exclusion has not been sufficient in the effort to gradually decimate union strength. The executive has also adopted the novel tactic of negating union status, with the Ministry for Social Protection – a new ministry that came about with the 2002 fusing of the Health and Labour Ministries into one, as a strategy to inject efficiency, while downsizing ca-

capacity, into key fundamental social governance bodies – rejecting the request of 253 unions for official registry (between 2002-2007), thereby contravening Article 39 of the 1991 Political Constitution and the ILO Convention 87 (1948).⁶ Indeed, the clear position of utter contempt the Uribe Government has shown the normativity underlying ILO Conventions already ratified by Colombia (especially Conventions 87, 98, and 154)⁷ has brought about an unprecedented drop in union impact, even in the workplaces of its members. In the last decade there has been a 62% decline in collective bargaining in the country, with only 2 in every 100 workers benefiting from the protection of a collective pact.⁸

Aside from this precipitous drop in union-led workplace negotiational capacity and coverage, Colombian unions have been dealt a harsh blow by a government bent on flirting and cohering with capital, regardless of the resulting impoverishment in worker conditions and rights. In the labour-capital relation, the most visual strength of the union movement capacity to disrupt production is its use of the “strike” as the ultimate means of appealing for labour’s voice to be heard. In Colombia, however, the Uribe Government has adopted the frequent tactic of declaring worker strikes as illegal, utilizing a number of internationally-fragile legal groundings to do so: the strike takes place outside of a collective bargaining agreement; it is conducted by workers who do not have a working contract; union federations or confederations participate; public employees participate; that it takes place in public service sectors, telecommunication services, in the energy sector or in establishments of social assistance. Under such ambiguous legislation (all forming part of the CST), participating workers can be fired (article 450, CST), directly contravening continuous declarations of the ILO’s Committee for the Freedom of Association.⁹ What’s more, the Colombian President has been granted extraordinary powers (Article 1, paragraph 2, Law 1210

of 2008) which state that if a strike, due to its nature or magnitude, gravely affects the “health, security, public order or the economy, in all or part of the population, the President, after previous favourable consent from the Labour Room of the Supreme Court of Justice, can order the termination of the strike.” As such, the anti-union president attains the faculties not only of executive but also judge, making a mockery of the separation of State powers and ensuring that legitimate expressions of worker in-conformity with their working conditions comes up against a State system, disproportionately tilted toward the interests of the strongest force.

Concerning the “numbers game” of determining which murdered workers were unionists, the government has been ruthless in its pursuit of cleansing its tainted image before the eyes of the USA. While the National School of Trade Unionism in Colombia (*La Escuela Nacional Sindical*) claims that there were 70 trade unionist murders in 2005 and 72 in 2006, the Uribe Government speaks of 13 and 25 murders respectively (*Semana*, 12 March 2007)¹⁰; the disparity stems from the fact that the government does not count teachers as unionists despite the fact that FECODE, the Colombian Federation of Educators, is the strongest sectoral union in the country. This strategy of “removing the evidence” expresses the moral emptiness of a government intent on reinforcing the massive class-based inequities in the country, while proclaiming, internationally, that all is well in ‘Neverland.’

The very fact that teachers have been one of the prime targets of anti-unionist sentiment and violence, makes it a deplorable but politically convenient strategy of the government. And on top of this official denial of unionist assassination, the unbelievably high rates of judicial impunity regarding trade union murders, emphasize the hypocrisy of the government’s efforts to redress the situation of flagrant human rights violations of unionists. Of the more than 2600 trade unionist murders, the Office of the Public Prosecutor (*La Fiscalía*) has only investigated 1,104 cases, and of these only 90 court sentences have been made regarding the perpetrating person, leaving a flagrant hole of 96% impunity; and needless to say that attempts at pinning down the intellectual authors of the murders, rather than the paid-killers, have never been really explored by the judicial authorities.

The evident ties between union assassinations and the Uribe Government were thrown into the public spotlight with the arrest of the Director of Colombia’s Secret Service Department (*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad – DAS*), Jorge Noguera in January 2007. Noguera who collaborated with Uribe in his first presidential campaign, was surprisingly given the task of leading the DAS in August of that year despite having no experience or qualifications in the field. He quickly began collaborating with known paramilitaries (from the AUC), culminating in his arrest for handing over confidential information surrounding the identities and places of residence of numerous trade unionists, a number of whom were later murdered. Despite the political ramifications when this scandal broke out, Uribe deterred from denouncing Noguera and instead, offered him the position of Consul in The Colombian Consulate in Milan, Italy. Since his arrest, numerous other scandals have been made public, includ-



ing the DAS-instigated “telephone-tapping” abuse of numerous political opposition leaders and Colombia’s two leading trade union confederation offices (CUT and CGT).

The protracted anti-unionist violence and the implicit condoning of this by the Uribe Government, has reinforced the already-active policy of liquidating the labour movement materially, not being content with the political exclusion it has faced, especially in the past 25 years. But perhaps the process that has most weakened Colombian trade unionism in recent years is the emphatic rise of Cooperatives of Associated Work (*Cooperativas de Trabajo Asociado* – CTA), created by Law 79 of 1988, but remaining almost stillborn prior to the emergence of Uribe’s “pro-rich” politico-economic programme.

Making a mockery of the worker-inspired cooperative model associated with Robert Owen in the early 19th century in Britain, the Colombian CTA model is premised on the disappearance of any “formal” ties between the employer-employee while maintaining the strict regime of worker exploitation and employer control of the labour process. While in 2000 there existed only 572 CTAs in the country, two years after Uribe took office this number had grown to 2631, and according to dubious figures taken from all of Colombia’s local chamber of commerce, for the first three months of 2009, there existed 5997 such cooperatives.¹¹ If we take the figures of the Superintendent for Social Economy (*La Superintendencia de la Economía Social*), however, the number of CTAs in existence as of 2009 comes to more than 12,000.

Irrespective of the actual number, their growth has been phenomenal as has their economic clout, with the Cooperative Association (Confecoop) claiming that collectively they have an annual income of over 20 billion Colombian pesos, equal to 5.61% of the country’s GNP for 2008 (Cambio 13 May 2008).¹² In terms of worker affiliation, there are now over 4 million Colombians associated with CTAs, thereby negating these workers any possibility of becoming registered members of a trade union, as well as absolving the “employers” of having to contribute to the worker’s pension fund, health insurance, overtime pay, holiday pay and all the other rights fought for over the past 100 years of Colombian trade union activity. As such, in the seven years since Colombia’s “new” history, the trade union movement has lost 78,000 members or 15% of its national total, through this very proactive State campaign of mixing bullets with slick, pro-business, labour-law reforms.

In the face of a continued and even intensified assault on a fledgling trade union movement, there is a need for international worker solidarity with Colombian unionists. At a time when legislative pens are poised to write-off the small benefits Colombian workers are struggling to hold onto, such solidarity is critical. **R**

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Endnotes

1. Claudia López, *Sin Democracia, Sin Derechos: Quinto año de gobierno de Álvaro Uribe Vélez* (Bogotá: Coordinación Colombia Europa Estados Unidos, 2008), pp. 35-44.
2. Miguel Eduardo Cárdenas, ‘Treinta Años de Sindicalismo en Colombia: Vicisitudes de una Transformación’ in F. L. Buitrago (ed.), *En La Encrucijada: Colombia en el Siglo XXI* (Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma/ CESO de la Universidad de los Andes, 2006), p. 239.
3. Of the party’s 14 parliamentarians, 8 were murdered, alongside the assassinations of 2 presidential candidates, 11 of the party’s 23 elected mayors, 13 deputies, 60 local councillors; combining to reach a total of over 5000 political murders, according to León Valencia, Director of the Corporación NuevoArco Íris. See: *El Tiempo*, 14 November 2008, at www.eltiempo.com.
4. Luis Sandoval, *Sindicalismo y Democracia: Cambios en el Movimiento. Nuevo enfoque de la acción sindical* (Bogotá: Ismac-Fescol, 1988), pp. 93-95.
5. Guillermo Correa Montoya, *Informe Nacional de Trabajo Decente 2008* (Medellín: Escuela Nacional Sindical, 2009), p. 69.
6. This untenable position in the eyes of the international community was given legal breadth by Article 372 of the Substantive Work Code, under Law 584 of 2000, reforming the Work Code and requiring that trade unions inscribe the Act of Constitution before the Ministry for Social Protection, which can thereby reject the inscription on the basis of arbitrary administrative decisions.
7. Convention 87 concerns the Freedom of Association; Convention 98 concerns the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining; Convention 154 is the Collective Bargaining Convention. In total, Colombia has ratified 54 ILO Conventions.
8. Luciano Sanín, ‘Violencia, impunidad y violación a los derechos laborales y sindicales. Cultura y Trabajo’, *Revista de la ENS*, 2009, V. 76, p. 6.
9. For examples of the Committee’s stance on the matter, see: 342° and 348°, Case Report 2356, 348°, 343°, 337°; Case Report 2355; against the Colombian Government.
10. ‘Deuda Pendiente’, *Semana*, 12 March 2007, at www.semana.com.
11. See: Ministerio de la Protección Social, ‘Principales Indicadores Laborales’, *Bóletin No.3*, Junio, 2009, at www.minproteccionsocial.gov.co/obtrabajo/pdf/.
12. ‘Los “Coopmillonarios”’ *Cambio*, 13 May 2008, at www.Cambio.com.co.

Cuba in Search of Renovation

Janette Habel

On January 1, 1959, the rebel army entered Havana and brought down the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. Fifty years later, Fidel Castro has given up power, but his brother Raúl has relieved him. Far from being characterized by paralysis, this transition period has witnessed the emergence of an intense debate about the future of socialism, both among opponents as well as those who defend it with the desire to see it evolve.

“To get out of the chaos without falling under the domination of the law of the jungle,” is how sociologist Aurelio Alonso sums up the Cuban dilemma. Half a century since the rebel army took power, the island finds itself at a turning point in its history. “Provisionally” absent since July 2006 for reasons of health, Fidel Castro is now no longer President, since he resigned his responsibilities in 2008. But he continues being first secretary of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) until its next congress, which his brother Raúl has proposed should take place in the autumn of 2009.

The political scenario is unprecedented. “I am not saying goodbye to you. I only want to be a soldier of ideas. I will continue writing under the title ‘Reflections of Compañero Fidel.’ ... Perhaps my voice will be heard. I will be careful.”^[1] So explained the Commander in Chief on February 19, 2008, upon announcing that he was retiring from the top leadership.

During his swearing-in five days later, Raúl Castro asked the National Assembly to consult with his older brother regarding the great strategic questions of defense, foreign relations, and economic development. The legislators, in a show of hands, unanimously ratified the proposal.

Some observers see this vote as having given Fidel Castro a kind of veto power, which would explain the slowness of the reforms. Since then, the ex-president continues to publish his “reflections” in the media. For his brother Raúl, the succession is a sensitive issue.

No sooner had it begun than the succession collided with an unforeseen congeries of difficulties arising from specific situations (a rise in the prices of primary agricultural materials, the seriousness of the disasters arising from three consecutive hurricanes,^[2] a world financial crisis, a slowing of Cuban growth) and structural obstacles (a heavy dependence on imports, low productivity, a dual monetary system,^[3] hyper-bureaucratic centralization).

The latitude for financial maneuvers in order to carry out in a timely fashion the changes announced in 2007 with the goal of modernizing the productive machinery is limited. In 2008, food and petroleum imports should have represented at least five billion dollars, that is half of the existing exporting potential of Cuba, including the sale of services to Venezuela.^[4]

The decentralization of agricultural systems, the use of uncultivated lands which have been turned over to small farmers, the policy of the substitution of imports supported by private agricultural producers, and the new wage policies^[5] make up some of the important measures already taken by the new executive branch.

Some economists argue that it is necessary to “liberate the productive forces,” as the Vietnamese government succeeded in doing. The current system cannot, in their opinion, serve as a point of departure for development. The economist Pedro Monreal suggests the necessity of an “economic, social and political re-foundation.”^[6]

Nevertheless, support for individual economic activity and the consequences of an extension of the market economy could aggravate inequalities, already very unpopular, at a moment in which wages are inadequate, as Raúl Castro has publicly recognized and lead to an expansion of the informal economy and the black market.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The economic market reforms of the 1990s destabilized the society and led to the creation of new social strata. The Cuban sociologist Mayra Espina asserts that “the urban population living in poverty whose basic needs are not satisfied increased from 6.3% in 1988 to 20% in 2000.”^[7]

“The urban and rural petty bourgeoisie [small capitalists] was restored as a result of the informal economy, independent labour and the broadening of market mechanisms for distribution. In the informal economy some operations can be observed which function like small businesses and in which it is possible to clearly see the boss or employer of wage earners, of family members and even of apprentices.”^[8]

The social homogeneity and the equality achieved at the beginning of the Revolution have receded, even though they remain deeply rooted values of the society. Before the crisis, the universal character of social rights guaranteed total coverage in the areas of basic food needs, education, health, social security, employment and access to cultural resources. Society had achieved relatively high levels of equality and had increased racial integration.^[9]

The crisis has undermined these achievements and has increased tensions. Never was the gap between the younger and the older revolutionary generation so great.

The new generations have never known anything but the austerity of the “special period” (provoked after 1991 by the fall

of the Soviet bloc) and a society which has nothing to do with that of their elders. They consider the Batista dictatorship to be ancient history taught in the school books. The adventurous period of the 1980s is nothing more than a vague memory, even though it was in many cases what permitted their parents to move up in society.

While education deteriorated, some teachers gave up their jobs for better paid activities in the market. Sometimes they are replaced by “teacher trainees,” young educators with little experience who have taken a short teacher training course. “Teaching is a disaster,” exclaims one of the participants in a public debate organized by the magazine *Temas*, echoing the notable intervention of Alfredo Guevara, the director of the Latin American Film Festival during the convention of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC), when he criticized “the absurd standards and the practices that dominate education.”^[10]

Why is there such a lack of interest in politics among the youth? “It makes me sick,” said one of them, exasperated by the leaders’ daily “exhortations” and political “orientations.” The feeling that they have no professional future corresponding to the education they have received is widespread and many try to get away from the island.

In February 2008, during a very well-publicized debate, a student presented his complaints to Richard Alarcón, the President of the National Assembly: Why does one need permission to travel? Why is access to the internet restricted?

During an investigation carried out over several months, Michelle Chase, a historian from the United States, pointed out that the principal criticisms have to do with the lack of discussion and the sclerosis of the institutions.^[11] Some students and researchers put their emphasis on the need to “socialize power.”^[12]

In 2007, at the University of Havana there was a public meeting attended by six hundred people where information on the October Revolution [in Russia in 1917] was presented. These Inheritors of the Revolution call themselves socialists and re-read the “classics” of Marxism. But, a sign of the times, none of them calls himself a “*Fidelista*.”

A SPACE FOR HOPE

By publicly recognizing that the system isn’t working well, that wages are inadequate, and that it is necessary to make “structural changes,” Raúl Castro has created a lot of hope. By calling upon his compatriots to participate in a great national debate, the new President opened a space for the expression of differences.

Even though no synthesis of the discussion has been made public, it is known that the party members said that were in favor of a more participatory and democratic socialism. The population – and principally the opposition – demands above all improvements in everyday life. There must be change. But what sort? When? And how?

“Cuba is beginning to move, the existing model is in crisis,” comments the young researcher Ariel Dacal. For two years now there have been collective expressions of criticisms about the existing problems, or about the meaning of the experiences of the past.

In January 2007, during the convalescence of Fidel Castro, the broadcasting of a television program which was complacent about the old censorship of the 1970s led to a collective petition, called the “war of the emails,” because for the first time it was carried out on the internet.

The text, signed by numerous public figures, cultural, political (Alfredo Guevara, Mariela Castro, the daughter of Raúl Castro) and religious (Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Céspedes), was followed by a series of conferences and a book which drew a balance of the “leaden years.”^[13]

In a way that is unprecedented, observes Disiderio Navarro, director of the magazine *Criterios*, “a public sphere has been created which makes up for the failings of the media.” The debates continued in April 2008 in the convention of UNEAC, during the Book Fair, and in meetings organized by the magazine *Temas*, or in educational centers, such as the Martin Luther King Center.

The existence of the internet site Kaosenlared [Chaos on the internet], which makes available Cuban writing, makes possible reactions and the spread of exchanges and discussions on a scale unknown until now.

What is talked about? What are the differences of opinion? Party members, researchers, intellectuals and some student groups are looking for another kind of socialism. This search is accompanied by a critical re-examination of real socialism and an evaluation of the fall of the Soviet Union, an analysis which, as the writer Amborsio Fornet remembers, was always rejected in the past “so as not to put unity in jeopardy and not to give arms to our adversaries.” But that was a case of a “phony unity.”^[14]

Alfredo Guevara criticizes “the conversion of ideas into ritual, into words, into ceremony, a frequent thing in history among bureaucrats and opportunists.”

Two big issues stand at the center of the debates. In first place, the economy. And then the role of popular participation. Why doesn’t the economy work? What are the relations between the state and the market in an economy in transition to socialism? What can Cuba learn from the Chinese experience, and, above all, from the Vietnamese?

The answers given by “Raulistas” and “Fidelistas” differ. Even though neither the one nor the other lays responsibility at the door of their mentors, the differences can be seen at the highest levels.

Where is Raúl Castro headed, and where might he arrive? Pragmatic, Raúl emphasizes the need to get the economy out of the doldrums and to improve the revenue from agriculture (more

than half of the land goes uncultivated). At the same time, he promotes a better organized operation, one that is more respectful of the institutional order, which had been regularly subjected to short circuits by his older brother.

With these economic reforms, he hopes to perpetuate the political system, but without destabilizing it, in order to prepare for a post-Castro era. That explains his interest in the Vietnamese experience, which seems to show that one can take from capitalism all that is efficient in the market economy, without calling into question the one-party political system.

A TRANSITION TO WHERE?

But can this experience be brought to Cuba? And would the Cubans accept their social cost, after so many years of difficulties? Once the idea of shock therapy has been set aside, the idea of a slow and gradual transition begins to gain ground. Nevertheless, Raúl Castro is 77 years old: he has little time.

On the other hand, those who oppose market reforms warn of the danger that these reforms would mean for the system. Fidel Castro has never hidden his reservations with regard to these “capitalist mechanisms” whose political consequences he fears. He always emphasized voluntarism and social mobilization.

Juan Valdés Paz, a political scientist, sums up the differences:

“For some the revolution is a historical process which advances by leaps and that, in order to progress, should propose the impossible. This is a very strong current of opinion, perhaps the strongest in the revolution. But other revolutionaries are more realistic, since they’ve come to understand that there are situations which the revolution lacks the means to resolve. It is an interesting debate between, let us call them, utopian options, between subjective Marxists and more realistic party members, preoccupied with concrete objectives who take concrete circumstances into account.”

Significantly, the theoretical and political journal of the Central Committee of the PCC, *Socialist Cuba*, has republished the old speeches of Fidel Castro.^[15]

One of these, given in 1988 and “always timely” according to the editor, points out the importance of the defense of the country and the ideological battle:

“Some occasionally ask themselves if it would not be more worthwhile to dedicate all of these energies, all of these efforts, all of the resources to the construction of socialism, to the development of the country... But that would be a grave misunderstanding, a criminal misunderstanding, because it is the price that our people must pay for the revolution, for their freedom, for their independence.”

This was before the crisis: the Cuban economy already had difficulties.

Who’s running Cuba? This irate question is spoken in a low voice. Fidel Castro asserts that it is not he, and that he will not be the head of any “faction.” Nevertheless, a detailed analysis of the November 19 issue of [Cuba’s daily government newspaper] *Granma* is revealing. At the top, on the first page, a headline in thick red letter proclaims “Fidel Receives Hu Jintao.” And on the bottom of the page, in smaller black letters, one finds an announcement of the meeting between the Cuban President and the Chinese President: “Official Conversations between Raúl and Hu Jintao.”

It’s hard to believe that this was simply a mistake made when the paper was laid out, particularly when one knows the control exercised over the paper by the Central Committee of the PCC.

It is difficult in itself to identify leanings of the various state agencies. The Revolutionary Armed Forces continue to be omnipresent. Raúl Castro was their minister during almost half a century, and they control directly or indirectly two-thirds of the economy. Their firms are at the center of many transformations, and the military officials who direct them have begun to experiment with capitalist management methods, so that one can imagine they will throw their weight behind the reforms. Even so, it is important to be careful with any generalization.

Some Party cadres, from the unions or from the popular organizations express their reservations. A union leader points out to us the risks inherent in the phenomenal development of China, confronted with “an unequal distribution of revenues, poverty, and a marked difference between the city and the countryside, as well as the degradation of the environment.”

Celia Hart, whose political sensibility inclined toward Fidel Castro, declared in August of 2008 that she feared that “Cuba may follow the same direction as China.”^[16] A high Cuban functionary cited the former Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki: “No one has experience with the transition from socialism to capitalism. If I had known that there would be 18 percent unemployment, perhaps I might have tried to go less quickly.”

Even though none of the leaders proposes political changes, under the influence of the Latin American left one feels the aspiration for a participatory democracy, a self-managed socialism. “The people criticize institutions that are too bureaucratic, they ask for greater participation from the social base,” comments Juan Valdés Paz.

This demand, theorized by the intellectuals, is accompanied by a criticism of the role of the PCC. “The party cannot direct the state, it is the people who should do it,” declares a party member. “I believe that we should recognize that we have constructed a structure which is too dominated by the state, highly bureaucratized, with a very limited participation by the people in the decision making system,” says Aurelio Alonso.

For the first time, “programmatic proposals” have been published on the website Kaosenlared intended for the Sixth Congress of the PCC set for the end of 2009. This platform, titled

“Cuba needs a participatory and democratic socialism” is presented by “Cuban communists and revolutionaries” and is inspired by Pedro Campos, a former diplomat who, in the past, held positions in the Ministry of the Interior. Campos, who makes a poor living and rejects interviews, did accept one with *Le Monde diplomatique*. Those who do not have access to the internet can go to his house and get the text of the thirteen “proposals” which condemn authoritarian “state socialism.”

In the opinion of the authors of the proposals, it is necessary to create workers’ councils that would control the decisions in the workplaces, to modify the electoral system so that there is more democratic participation, to revise the penal system’s practices which lead to convictions for political reasons, to declare illegal “aid” from foreign governments with subversive objectives, at the same time it is necessary to legalize the right of association and expression.

Finally, the proposal comes out in favor of a Communist Party which would permit the existence of internal currents. Some very popular demands complete the proposal, especially the elimination of the need for permission to leave the country and unlimited access to the internet. Cuban public figures take part in this electronic forum, discussing the relations between the state and property, self-management and the market, socialism and democracy, at a time when we are approaching the end of an historic cycle.

SLOWLY CHANGING BEHAVIOR

As the change of this current period is being sketched out – including the arrival in the White House of Barack Obama – behavior is evolving in an imperceptible manner; political differences are being expressed. Rafael Hernández, editor of the magazine *Temas*, asks: How “to reconstruct the consensus”?

Any break in the top leadership could put in danger the system as a whole. How to replace the arbitrary acts carried out until recently by Fidel Castro, a charismatic (and, according to his brother Raúl, “irreplaceable”) leader? Through a more collective leadership, responds the new President, insisting on the regular and efficient functioning of the institutions. He has now isolated the “Taliban,” a nickname given to the young hacks who had surrounded the former President in his last years in office.

Whether or not the historic generation which still occupies key positions can reform that which they themselves created, or if, frightened by the changes, they will become paralyzed remains an unknown. In reality, the existing leadership is no younger than the former one – in fact, older. There are those who think that they need new actors so that the transformation will be credible. Among those whose days are numbered and those who are being pressed by time, history has still not given its verdict. **R**

Janette Habel teaches in Paris and is the author of *Cuba: The Revolution in Peril* (Verso: 1991).

Endnotes:

1. “Mensaje del Comandante en Jefe,” *Granma*, La Habana, February 19, 2008.
2. In 2008, hurricanes Gustav, Ike and Paloma damaged more than 400,000 houses, left 200,000 people without homes for a period of time, and completely destroyed 55,000 hectares of various crops.
3. The Cuban peso serves principally to pay wages and to buy basic necessities. The convertible peso (which replaced the [U.S.] dollar in 2004) is used by tourists and is needed to acquire various commodities.
4. Philippe Colombani, *La Lettre de La Havane*, n° 82, French Embassy, Economic Mission, June 2008.
5. From now on workers will be paid according to their production; their basic wage will be established without consulting the national wage table and within firms there could be different pay systems.
6. Espacio Laical, La Habana, February 2008.
7. Mayra Paula Espina Prieto, *Políticas de atención a la pobreza y la desigualdad*, CLACSO, Buenos Aires, 2008.
8. Mayra Paula Espina Prieto, “Viejas y nuevas desigualdades en Cuba,” *Nueva Sociedad*, n° 216, La Habana, July-August 2008.
9. Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All. Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
10. Séptimo Congreso de la UNEAC, April 1, 2008.
11. Michelle Chase, “Cuba’s Generation Gap,” *NACLA Report*, vol. 41, n° 6, New York, November-December 2008.
12. Julio Cesar Guanche “Todo lo que existe merece perecer,” September 15, 2008: www.kaosenlared.net.
13. “La política cultural del período revolucionario, memoria y reflexión,” ciclo de conferencias organizado por el Centro teórico-cultural Criterios, Havana, 2007.
14. “El quinquenio gris: revisitando el término” in “La political cultural” conferences cited in note 13.
15. Fidel Castro, “Defendernos en el terreno militar y en el terreno ideológico,” discurso de 1988, en *Cuba Socialista*, n° 47, Havana, April-June 2008.
16. Página 12, Buenos Aires, 25 de agosto de 2008. Celia Hart, daughter of historic leaders of the Cuban Revolution Armando Hart and Haydée Santamaría, had been expelled from the PCC. She died tragically in an automobile accident.

Cuba Undertakes Reforms in Midst of Economic Crisis

Roger Burbach

Carlos picks me up with his dated Soviet-made Lada at the Jose Marti International Airport on a hot sweltering day in Havana. It's been eight months since I've seen him, last January to be precise, when I came to the island on the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution.

"How's it been?" I ask him as we begin the 20 minute drive to central Havana. With a scowl, he replies: "Not so good, nothing seems to get easier." He goes on to say that foodstuffs are as difficult as ever to come by, necessitating long waits in line for rationed commodities.

I am not surprised, as I had been reading in the international press that Cuba has been compelled to curtail its food imports. Hit by the global economic crisis, spending by tourists dropped off while the price of nickel, Cuba's main mineral export, fell by more than half.

This meant that Cuba has no choice but to cut agricultural imports from its main supplier, the United States. Credit purchases are not an option, as the U.S. legislation in 2000, opening up agricultural sales to Cuba, requires immediate payment in hard currency.

To add to its woes, devastating hurricanes hit Cuba in 2008, decimating some of the country's sugar plantations, as well as its production of vegetables and staple foods. The only bright light in the midst of this food crisis is the implementation of reforms in the agricultural sector under Raúl Castro, who became acting president in July, 2006. He officially assumed the presidency from his brother Fidel after a vote by the Cuban National Assembly in February 2008.

I am particularly interested in knowing how the distribution of 690,000 hectares of idle lands to 82,000 rural families, in process when I left Cuba in January, has affected the domestic supply of fresh produce. On my second day, I go to one of the open markets in Havana where I talk to Margarita, who is selling undersized tomatoes. She says they come from her father's new farm. "We started cultivating tomatoes, as well as other vegetables," she says. "We even hired workers, which is now allowed. But then, as the crops began to mature, we got very little water from the state-owned irrigation system."

Fearing the worst, I ask her if the state is discriminating against the new producers. "No" she says, "the wells and the irrigation system simply didn't have any gas for the pumps."

Later in the day, I meet with Armando Nova, an agricultural economist at the Center for the Study of the Cuban Economy. I had also talked with him in January and he had then been optimistic about the coming year. I ask him what's gone wrong and he says, "We're caught between the effects of the global economic crisis and the difficulties of implementing the reforms." He goes on to say that there has actually been an increase in fresh produce since the beginning of the year, but it is hardly noticeable in the markets because of the increased demand, a result of the drop in international imports.

As to the economic reforms, Nova says: "The top leadership around Raúl is committed to a fundamental shake up of the economy, but change is slow because of bureaucratic obstacles." The very process of distributing idle lands requires 13 steps of paper work submitted to

different agencies. And while the government is committed to providing the new farmers with the inputs needed to start up production, many of them are not delivered because they are simply not available due to the economic crisis.

Nova's view that reforms are inevitable is reinforced in a special report on the economy released by Inter Press Service (IPS), which is affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Relations: "There is an ever broadening consensus about the necessity of a profound transformation of the Cuban economic model. It is recognized that the future strategy should include non-state forms of property – not only in agriculture, but also in manufacturing and services." The publication asserts, "Fifty years of socialism in Cuba have to be re-evaluated," particularly the role of the state and the need to use market mechanisms.

To facilitate this transformation, the government is opening up a 45-day public discussion that includes union centers, schools, universities, community organizations and the base of the Cuban Communist party. According to materials sent out to orientate the discussions, the participants should "not only identify problems, but also suggest solutions. The analysis ought to be objective, sincere, valiant, creative, carried out in absolute liberty with respect for discrepant opinions."

According to Orlando Cruz of the Institute of Philosophy, whom I met at a conference in Havana on social movements, "socialism is to be re-founded in Cuba. We have to totally discard the Soviet model that so badly served us." I ask whether Cuba will now move toward the Chinese model. Like others in Cuba in the party and the government I have

asked the same question. He responds somewhat curtly:

“We respect the Chinese model, but we have to follow our own process and history. China is a totally different country.”

Cruz makes clear that there will be meaningful democratic participation in the new Cuba:

“We will not allow the formation of a petit-bourgeoisie to control or dis-

tort the process. We want to construct an authentic democratic socialism. It will be deeper and more participatory than that of the social democracies of Europe.”

I first went to Cuba in 1969 and have visited the country every decade since then. There have been many challenging moments in the revolution’s history, and now we are witnessing another one, as the country embarks on an endeavor to free the economy from the shackles of its bureaucracy. The fate

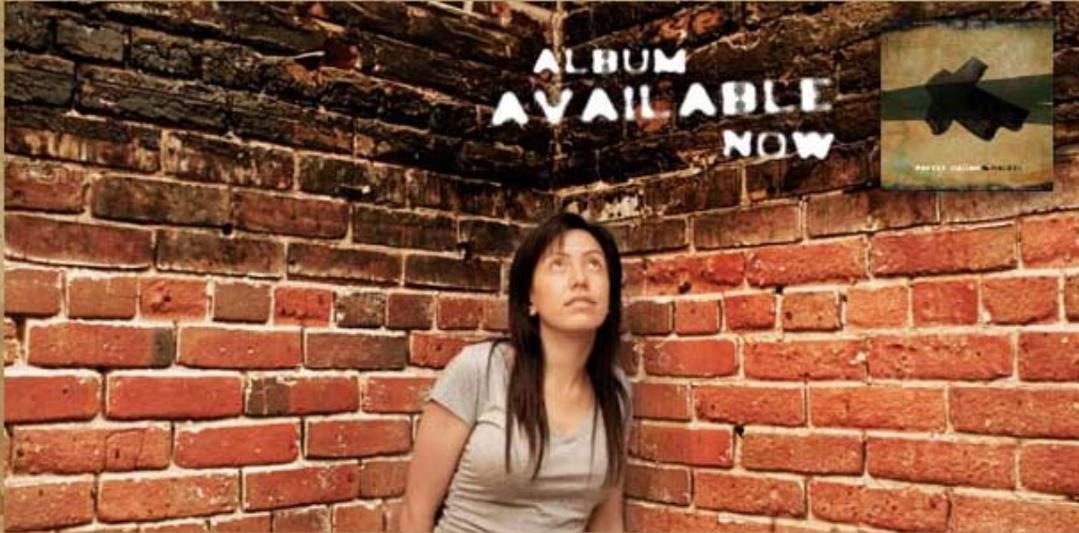
of this move depends on the ability of society at the grass roots to exert a greater role in the country’s economic and political institutions. If this effort succeeds, the Cuban revolution will be opening a new path for socialism in the 21st century. **R**

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