

# NEW SOCIALIST

SEPT/OCT 2004 NO. 48 \$2/\$3 NEWSSTANDS

## PRISONS OF CAPITALISM

THE FUTURE OF ANTI-CAPITALISM  
A NEW WORKERS' PARTY IN BRAZIL

**BUSH vs. KERRY: DOES IT MATTER?**

SOLIDARITY: CALL FOR NEW DIRECTION FOR BC LABOUR

# EDITORIAL

## Against “humanitarian” interventions

A vast humanitarian crisis is unfolding in the Darfur region of Sudan. A quarter of the population – 1.5 million people – have been displaced and become refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. They live in desperate conditions and face the threat of mass starvation. Tens of thousands of civilians have already been slaughtered by the Sudanese government and paramilitary forces.

What should be done about this? Obviously emergency food, water and medicine are urgently needed. Countless billions of dollars are spent every year by the US, the countries of the European Union and other states on the production of weapons. Billions could easily be set aside for emergency assistance and longer-term aid if it was a political priority.

After years of civil war in Sudan, Western governments have at last “discovered” the crisis in Darfur. The UN Security Council has now passed a resolution that threatens the regime with sanctions. The spectre of military intervention by African countries acting as proxies for Western powers – or by Western troops under the UN banner – hangs on the horizon if the Sudanese government doesn't comply.

Some human rights activists are responding positively to the possibility of military intervention in Sudan. This is a very short-sighted view. It assumes the existing powers in the world can be a force for genuine solutions to social crises. The case for “humanitarian” military intervention involves the simplistic creation of “bad guys” and usually ignores how Western states and corporations are quite prepared to deal with the bad guys if it suits them.

True, Sudanese governments have a long history of human rights abuses and hostility to movements for autonomy. But many advocates of military intervention totally neglect the role of imperialism in the current devastation.

Much of Africa is in a state of economic collapse, leading to mass hunger. Poverty coupled with AIDS has caused life expectancy in seven countries to plunge to under 40.

Western imperialism has distorted the social development of Africa and continues to do so. Arms sales to military regimes, low prices for African exports, IMF-imposed structural adjustment programs including cutbacks to public services, pharmaceutical companies blocking the mass production and distribution of cheap drugs for people living with AIDS – all have taken a vast human toll.

Western governments have displayed a totally opportunistic attitude in Sudan. They have often supported the Sudanese

government as a Cold War ally or because they wish to access Sudan's oil resources. In 1998 the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton launched military action which destroyed Sudan's main pharmaceutical plant and half of Sudan's medicines and veterinary supplies. Until very recently, the Bush administration had been trying to improve relations with the Sudanese regime to promote the development of oil.

Why target the Sudanese government now? One answer is that it is a convenient enemy: an Islamic government engaged in murderous actions in Africa while US troops are battling Islamist and other national liberation forces in Iraq. Here's a chance for the US and UN to appear to be on the right side of the angels and bolster public support for wars of intervention at a time when the occupation of Iraq has left US and British imperialism tarnished with blood and lies.

Sudan is not the only country against which the US may be engineering intervention. Washington is seeking to get rid of troublesome regimes in Latin America that are obstacles to its domination.

In Venezuela, a leading supplier of oil to the US, the White House, Venezuelan opposition and privately owned media of the wealthy have used many means to try and overthrow the democratically-elected Chavez government. In August, the US-backed opposition forced a recall referendum. On August 15, the Venezuelan people gave Chavez a resounding 58 percent plus mandate. This was an important setback for US interventionist plans. Short-term prospects for a direct US intervention to oust Chavez have faded. However the US government has a clear-track of long-term efforts to get rid of regimes from Nicaragua to Cuba.

We must remember that it's not only the US government that seeks to intervene. Opposition to the US-led war on Iraq helped keep the federal Liberal government at a distance from unilateral US aggression. However, the Liberals have few scruples when the UN or NATO seal of approval is added. Canadian troops continue to be part of NATO's imperialist operation in Afghanistan. The Canadian government was part and parcel of the game that got rid of Haitian President Aristide.

Whether it flies the Stars and Stripes, the Maple Leaf or the blue UN flag, imperialism is not benign and it offers no real alternative to repressive regimes. For this reason, people who want to change the world for the better should consistently oppose imperialist interventions around the globe – even so-called “humanitarian” interventions. ★

**NEW SOCIALIST** aims to help build unions and social movements along the lines of solidarity, democracy and militancy, a new Left committed to making change through struggle, and a renewed socialism from below current. For more information about the publisher of this magazine, the New Socialist Group, please see the inside back cover.

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## 2004 US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

# *Anybody but Bush?*

BY CHARLIE POST

Less than three years ago, the Bush administration enjoyed tremendous popular approval. All questions about the legitimacy of the 2000 elections disappeared in the aftermath of the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. Today, with a little over three months before the presidential election, the Bush regime is in deep trouble.

The growing quagmire in Iraq, the failure to find “Weapons of Mass Destruction” or any credible links between the secular dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and the Islamists of Al-Qaida, the revelations of US torture and humiliation of Iraqi prisoners – together with an economic “recovery” that has restored capitalist profits, but not employment or wages for working people – have undermined the Bush administration’s popular support. Currently, the majority of Americans believes that the war in Iraq was a mistake and question whether Bush deserves a second term.

Despite the Bush administration’s falling support, the Democrats are having a hard

time generating much excitement for their presidential candidate, John Kerry, the former anti-war Vietnam veteran and Senator from Massachusetts. A brief review of Kerry’s politics helps explain the public’s lukewarm response. Kerry, while bemoaning the strains in the alliance between the US and the European imperialist powers, supported the Iraq war, opposes US withdrawal and calls for an increased US troop presence in Iraq. Kerry voted for the USA Patriot Act, which curtails civil liberties for both people born in the US and immigrants and promises to pursue a more effective “war on terrorism” at home and abroad. He is a committed neo-liberal. Kerry supported NAFTA, GATT and, despite new found (and quite transitory) concerns about environmental protection and workers’ rights, the FTAA. Kerry supported the dismantling of cash assistance for single mothers and cuts in other social welfare programs under the Clinton and Bush administrations. While claiming to support legal abortion – but not public funding for abortion for poor women – Kerry has made clear his “personal opposition” to abortion. On

*Kerry supported the Iraq war, opposes US withdrawal and calls for an increased US troop presence in Iraq.*

the issue of same-sex marriage – and the ability of gays and lesbians to enjoy the same legal rights as straight couples – Kerry supports “civil unions,” which would continue to condemn gays and lesbians to second-class citizenship.

The official leaderships of the labour, women’s, queer and black and Latino movements, however, are backing the Democrats. Since the 1930s, the officialdoms of the popular movements have hitched their wagons to the capitalist-dominated and -led Democratic Party. The Democrats appeared to be the party of “reform” through the 1970s as they actually responded, as did the Republicans, to the tumultuous social struggles of the 1930s and 1960s. The labour bureaucracy and the middle-class leaders of the social movements demobilized and disorganized these struggles to cement their alliance with the Democrats. The Democrats have not reciprocated, doing little for workers, people of colour, women or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered (LGBT) people since the 1970s.

After the collapse of the social move-



An Iraqi victim of US military aggression.

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ments of the 1960s and the beginning of the global capitalist crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, the Democrats moved right and abandoned even the pretence of reform. This had little effect on the leaders of the labor and social movements, who continued to pour millions of dollars and thousands of activist hours into the campaigns of Democrats who sought to continually distance themselves from “special interests” like workers, women, people of colour and gays and lesbians.

2004 is no different. After the half-hearted attempt by some unions and civil rights organizations to support the lukewarm anti-war candidacy of Vermont Governor Howard Dean failed, all the forces of official reform in the US are backing Kerry. In order not to “embarrass” Kerry or “divert energy” from his campaign, the leaders of the labour and social movements have opposed any mobilizations by their ranks. The mainstream gay and lesbian leadership helped derail a promising wave of direct actions, with hundreds of same-sex couples descending on city clerks’ offices demanding marriage certificates. The AFL-CIO leaders are opposing the Pacific coast longshore union’s call for a “million worker march” in Washington in October.

While the support of the labour officialdom and other reformist forces for the Democrats comes as no surprise, the support of the leadership of the anti-war and global justice movement for Kerry is a bit more surprising. Many who had supported Ralph Nader’s anti-corporate campaign in 2000 have today embraced the battle-cry of “Anybody But Bush” (ABB). The inability of the massive mobilizations of Winter-Spring 2003 to stop the Bush administration’s aggression against Iraq and the sharp polarization of the US electorate has convinced many radicals and anti-war and global justice activists that Bush must be defeated “at any cost.” They are willing to embrace a candidate and party which they recognize is pro-imperialist and pro-corporate as a “lesser evil” to defeat the “greater evil” represented by Bush and his neo-conservative cabal. For many on the US left, the defeat of the “Bush agenda” is the first step in stopping the right-ward rush of US politics.

Unfortunately, support for the Democratic “lesser evil” candidate actually facilitates the right-ward movement of politics in the US. The major elements of



the “Bush agenda” (imperialism and neo-liberalism) are shared by Kerry and the Democrats. The US left and social movements have, since the 1930s, consistently sacrificed building their own independent struggles and political organization in favor of supporting the Democrats. As a result, Democratic politicians have felt less and less pressure from the only forces that can push politics to the left: the labour and social movements mobilized in the workplace and streets.

#### PRESSURE FROM BELOW

With no pressure from “below,” and secure in the loyalty of workers, racial minorities, women and queer people on Election Day, the Democrats have followed the Republicans to the right. In 1992, Bill Clinton, a “liberal” Democrat, was elected on the same platform that Richard Nixon, a right-wing Republican, had campaigned for in 1972: “welfare reform,” “managed health care” and “free trade.”

The results of “ABB” will be much the same in 2004. Many in the anti-war and global justice movements are trimming their politics so as not to challenge Kerry and the Democrats. At the Boston Social

Forum, held during the Democratic National Convention in July, many activists refrained from criticizing Kerry’s pro-war and neo-liberal politics, focusing solely on the “Bush agenda.” The organizers of what promise to be massive protests at the New York Republican National Convention in August, in particular the leadership of United for Peace and Justice, are also toning down the politics of the demonstrations. Rather than raising the demand for US withdrawal from Iraq or the defeat of the FTAA, leaflets building these actions proclaim that “the world says no to the Bush agenda.” We are very likely to see a sharp downturn in anti-war and global justice protests through the November elections, which may extend into the spring of 2005 if Kerry is elected.

The emergence of an independent, anti-war and global justice presidential campaign in 2004 has been fraught with difficulties. The Green Party, which has ballot access in over twenty states and ran Ralph Nader in 1996 and 2000, was sharply divided over the 2004 elections.

Many Green activists wanted to run a national campaign with Nader, whose forty years of anti-corporate activism and 2000

campaign gave him a national profile. However, a significant layer of Green party members gravitated to the candidacy of David Cobb, a Texas Green who advocated a “safe-states” strategy: the Greens would only run a presidential campaign in the states where the Democrats had a clear majority. Although many Cobb supporters rejected the “safe states” strategy, which many pro-Nader Greens saw as a version of “ABB,” others found his long-term commitment to building the Green Party a refreshing change to Nader’s refusal to join or be accountable to the Greens. At the Green Convention in Milwaukee in June, Cobb secured the endorsement despite broad support — especially in Green primaries — for Nader.

Nader himself has put some obstacles in the way of rallying the support of radicals and anti-war and global justice activists. He refused to seek the Green Party nomination (instead seeking merely “endorsement”), reinforcing his image as a “loose cannon” among Green activists. He has also been appealing to “disaffected conservatives” who are disgusted with Bush’s war in Iraq and the repressive USA PATRIOT Act. Nader has gone as far as accepting the endorsement of the Reform Party, which had run the right-wing, anti-immigrant populist Pat Buchanan in 2004, but whose leadership has become pro-Nader and pro-

# *Support for the Democratic “lesser evil” candidate actually facilitates the right-ward movement of politics in the US.*

immigrant rights since the last election.

There are, however, some important hopeful signs that the Nader campaign will be able to again pose a clear left-wing, anti-war and global justice alternative in 2004. After several months of silence on the war, Nader has made his call for US withdrawal from Iraq a central element of his campaign since March, appearing at anti-war rallies and calling for Bush’s impeachment for lying about “weapons of mass destruction” and ties between the Iraqi regime and Al-Qaida. Nader has also chosen Peter Camejo as his running mate. Camejo, who ran as a revolutionary socialist in the 1976

Presidential election, ran two successful campaigns for Governor of California in 2002 and 2003, winning 3-5% of the popular vote. Camejo has also been central in recruiting immigrants and people of colour to the Greens in California, helping to change the image of the Greens as a primarily white, middle-class party.

Most promising has been the emergence of “Greens for Nader-Camejo.” Originally organized to secure the Green Party’s endorsement of Nader, “Greens for Nader-Camejo” has become the backbone of the grass roots campaign in 2004. This grouping of several hundred Green activists, including long-time and prominent left-wing Greens, is spearheading petitioning for ballot status, organizing campaign meetings and rallies and speaking at meetings across the country. More importantly, the “Greens for Nader-Camejo” will build the Green Party while campaigning in 2004, recruiting activists, building new party locals and developing new candidates for local and state elections.

Under the best of circumstances, the Nader-Camejo campaign in 2004 will not have the mass appeal of the Nader campaign in 2000, when the Greens won 3% of the vote nationwide. However, the Nader-Camejo campaign has the potential to be a pole of attraction for both anti-war and global justice activists and millions of working people in the US who want a clear alternative to the Bush and Kerry’s pro-imperialist and neo-liberal politics. Socialists and radicals, whatever our legitimate criticisms of Nader, need to be in this campaign to strengthen the anti-war and global justice movements today and build for an independent, working people’s party in the future. ★

## *“Bush’s Wars, the 2004 Elections and the Movements”*

WHAT DO WE ACHIEVE IF THE “LESSER EVIL” CANDIDATE WINS?

Is there an alternative to “Anybody but Bush?” How can activists for social change relate to the 2004 election? Is a “lesser-evil” choice a viable strategy for defeating the rightwing Bush agenda? Is independent politics possible?

A new pamphlet produced by the Global Justice/Anti-war Working Group of Solidarity explores these questions in the context of the long history of insurgent social movements, inside and outside the Democratic Party. It helps explain why and how both parties have responded obediently to the increasingly vicious corporate agenda.

The 40-page pamphlet is available for \$1.00 plus 50 cents postage; 40% discount on three or more copies. Order from:

Solidarity • 7012 Michigan Avenue • Detroit MI 48210  
[www.solidarity-us.org](http://www.solidarity-us.org)

## FILM REVIEW

# A movie, not a manifesto

FILM: *FAHRENHEIT 9/11*  
PRODUCED AND DIRECTED  
BY MICHAEL MOORE

REVIEWED BY LIISA SCHOFIELD

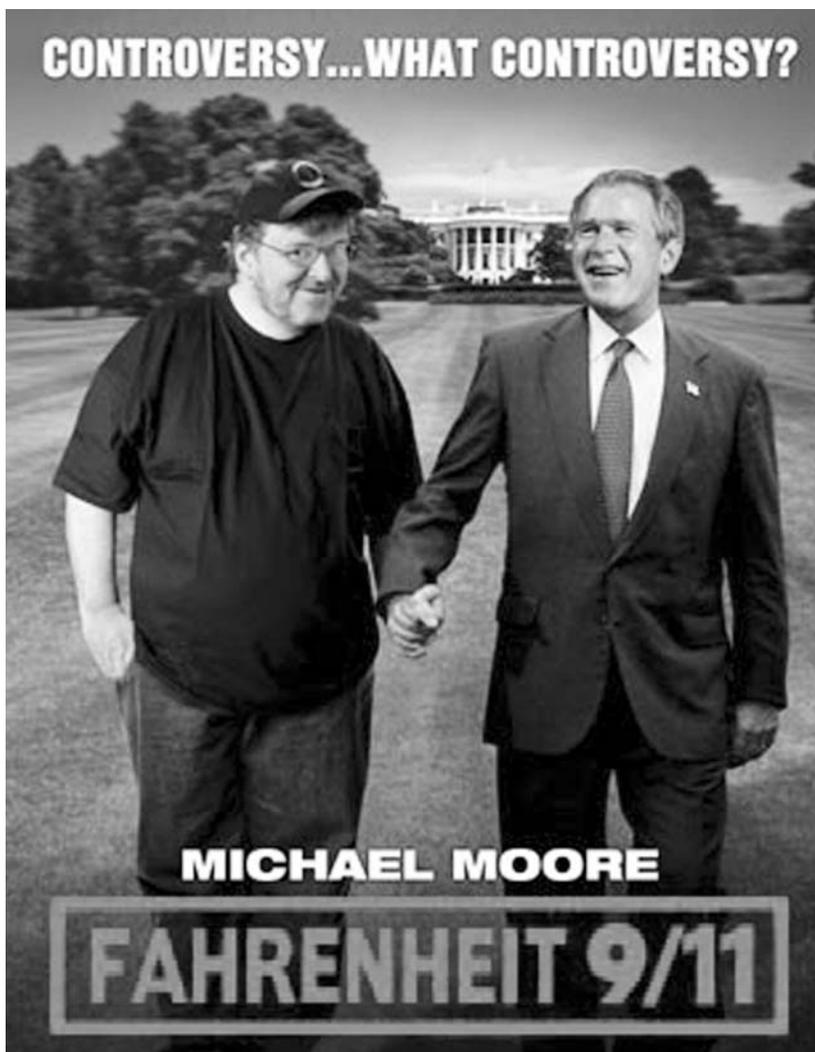
In June, Michael Moore's latest documentary, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, opened to blockbuster audiences, hyped-up media, a Palme D'Or at Cannes and the predictable critique and backlash. I saw the film on the Saturday before June 30th, the supposed handover day of Iraq from occupying forces to its 'independent' authority. In Toronto, as in many other cities, we were preparing for demonstrations to mark the handover and to target corporations that have set up shop in Iraq.

### THE BASIC SYNOPSIS

Moore begins *Fahrenheit 9/11* with an overview of the American elections. He immediately paints George W. Bush as a fraudulent President, and shows the public outrage expressed at the disenfranchisement of African Americans of Florida, as well as the massive protests along Bush's inauguration route to the White House. Bush's excessive vacationing in Texas is documented next, along with his disregard of security briefings in the months leading up to September 11th, 2001.

Following a solemn overview of the events of September 11th, Moore proceeds to launch into an exposé of the Bush family's corporate connections with the Bin Laden family and Saudi royals. He points out the interests of oil and capital in keeping those relations friendly.

While I found myself very annoyed at



the manner by which he painted the ambiguous "Saudi's", I could see that he was trying to lay the groundwork for proving that the justifications for the "War on Terror" were unfounded. Moore's arguments around US intervention in Afghanistan were also troubling: "not sending enough troops", "doing a half-assed job", etc. But again, in this we see Moore's attempts to point out the contradictions in Bush's plans by drawing upon the connections between Hamid Karzai, Unocal and Haliburton interests in natural gas pipelines through Afghanistan. He asks about the reasons for going to war (over

footage of deals being signed): "Was this really about our safety...or about something else?"

The remainder of the film is dedicated to the war on Iraq. Moore presents us with a very strong class analysis, addressing the vast difference between the men who send the US to wars and the soldiers who fight them – for example, the recruitment strategy targeting poor and racialized communities. He introduces us to Lila Lipscomb, the mother of Michael Petterson, a young American soldier in Iraq. Lila reads Michael's last letter home before he's killed: "What is that idiot (Bush) doing Mama –

*Liisa Schofield is an anti-war and anti-occupation activist.*

why does he have us out here?" Lila, a mother who encouraged her children to join the military because she could not afford to send them to college, breaks down. She takes her anger at her son's death to the White House – just as an Iraqi woman took her anger and pain out at the camera. These stories are poignant glimpses into how imperialist wars – waged by the ruling elite – brutally target poor people everywhere.

Moore then presents us with some very powerful accounts from Iraq – of emotionally detached soldiers, midnight raids on Iraqi civilian homes, the victims of bombing, mothers screaming in front of burned out buildings and soldiers injured or dying. These are strong images, and images that were denied the public during the war. As war was being waged in Iraq, the American (and Canadian) public were given clean images of 'precision bombing' and celebrating Iraqis. These images break down the justifications for the war and the mainstream narrative that supported it. Again, he points out the dirty business deals going on behind the scenes with the "Rebuilding Iraq" conference where executives talk about the great "opportunities" opening up in Iraq post-invasion. The viewer is given a priceless moment where Bush, speaking to a room full of business folk, says: "This is an impressive crowd - the haves and the have mores. Some people call you the elite, I call you my base".

Moore closes *Fahrenheit 9/11* by bringing it back to the soldiers. Again, he shows us footage from poor neighborhoods in Flint, Michigan. Over top he takes a quote from Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "A hierarchical society is only possible on the basis of poverty and ignorance...In principle the war effort is always planned to keep society on the brink of starvation. The war is waged by the ruling group against its own subjects and its object is not the victory over either Eurasia or East Asia but to keep the very structure of society intact..."

#### MY TWO CENTS

It must be said, there are some very suspect parts of this film that contain racist undertones. The film certainly does not help the

fight against racial profiling and detentions. He in fact uses very problematic imagery and language. Moore rightly criticizes the "Coalition of the Willing" and ridicules claims that the coalition represented broad international support for the war. However, he does so with images that play on terribly orientalist views of "backward countries" with people rubbing rocks together and living in huts. And when Moore goes over the attack on civil liberties post 9/11, he fails to mention the thousands of Arab and Muslim people profiled and brutally detained. Instead, we are told stories of well-intentioned white folks being investigated for organizing Peace groups or speaking their minds in work-out gyms. Certainly these cases pale in comparison to what Arab

***Moore does not take  
a politically clear stance  
and, indeed, avoids  
mention of racism  
and colonialism...***

and Muslim people have had to endure.

That being said, Moore works hard in *Fahrenheit 9/11* to target a specific audience of people who may waver in their support for Bush and the War on Iraq/continuing occupation. Moore very successfully highlights the seriousness of Bush's corporate connections and identifies the contradictions of their war on terrorism. He focuses on the human cost of war and how it is overwhelmingly the working class and those from racialized poor communities that bear the burden of war – for example, those serving in the military are predominantly poor black youth. By providing a window into the lives of ordinary Americans, Moore is able to expose the Bush administration as the ruling elite that it is. I believe that Moore chose his stories, his subjects, and even his nationalistic undercurrents, as a strategic method to target an audience of people who need to be convinced.

*Fahrenheit 9/11* makes the point loud and clear: that people from perpetually poor communities (like Flint, Michigan) are being used to continue an endless and unjust war for the sake of the ruling class. These are the arguments that people will believe. Unfortunately, Moore does not take as politically clear a stance as many of us would like, and indeed, avoids mention of racism, colonialism, and even Israel's involvement. These are vital matters to highlight that he unfortunately ignores. However, this is an "entry point" film. *Fahrenheit 9/11* is a beginner's manual for people who are wavering. It is for the voters of Bush, for the soldiers in Iraq – and for their families living in ghettos in the US. Is this film convincing? Yes, very much so.

And I believe that it can be used as a very powerful tool for mobilizing people in a movement against war and occupation.

I will end with this: upon my first viewing of the film I was very shaken up – but had very strong criticisms against it. I hated the representation of Afghanistan, the nationalistic undertones, and especially the problematic portrayal of civil liberties. The second time I went to see this film was in a small town in eastern Ontario with my Mom and Step-dad. In that little theatre I turned my head around to look at the faces of the people

watching the footage from Iraq. Their faces were blank as ghosts, many were crying, most looked shocked. My mom beside me was crying. In my mind I thought, this is who this film is for – not know-it-all urbanites and lefty academics like myself. It brought a humanity to the entire issue – it took it away from this abstract notion of Saddam/Osama, Bad; Retribution, Good. It showed a glimpse into what is behind war plans – both the business deals and the people who suffer. It is a stepping stone, a crack in the door. It is by no means everything – but it allows for much needed doubt and questions to enter peoples minds and for the flaws in this system to begin to be unraveled. Sometimes we forget that these steps are necessary – that faith in the system needs to first be challenged and broken bit by bit.

Then it is up to strong movements to help unravel the rest. ★

# *A new beginning for the Brazilian Left?*

BY ANDREW KENNEDY

**B**razil is the most populous country in Latin America and its strongest economy, with a long history of struggle. The Brazilian Workers' Party (PT), formed in 1980 as a democratic socialist party, seemed for a long time to embody that struggle. Hopes were high when the PT, led by Luis Ignacio da Silva (Lula), won the presidential election in October 2002 with 61% of the vote and became the biggest party in the National Congress.

But the new government swiftly showed that its central priorities were to appease the bankers and maintain financial "stability" at the expense of workers, the poor and the landless, continuing the policies of the previous government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso. It has maintained high interest rates which have attracted foreign speculators but crippled domestic growth. Unemployment grew to 12 per cent by February of this year and social spending has been cut.

Key to this neo-liberal programme was the government's public sector pension reform, which increased by seven years the amount of time that civil servants have to pay into their pension funds in order to receive benefits. Private firms have been allowed to administer these funds, paving the way for wholesale privatisation.

This year, Lula pushed for a tiny increase in the minimum wage from 240 to 260 reales. Allowing for inflation, this represents an increase of 1.2 per cent.

Even parties supposedly to his right were arguing for a level of 275 reales. The outcome is that millions of Brazilians and their families will have to exist on the equivalent of \$83 US per month.

Lula's foreign policy has been no better. He has agreed to a slightly modified version of the US-supported Free Trade Area of the Americas, leaving Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Fidel Castro isolated among Latin American leaders in their opposition. He has backed the US intervention in Haiti with Brazilian troops and has sent

soldiers to Colombia to help stabilise the situation in favour of the right-wing Uribe government.

The much-vaunted agrarian reform programme has proceeded at a snail's pace and in part only because of the pressure from the organisations of the landless, including the Landless Workers' Movement (MST). 21,000 families have been allocated land so far, as against a promise of 230,000 in the first sixteen months. In March the MST announced a return to its traditional tactic of occupying big estates: now 200,000 families wait for these expropriations to be legally confirmed while the government drags its feet.

Real agrarian reform conflicts fundamentally with the drive of the Lula government, in alliance with the big landowners, to increase exports of cash crops like soya



Brazilian workers' rally.

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*Andrew Kennedy is a member of the editorial board of Socialist Outlook, magazine of the International Socialist Group (British section of the Fourth International) and a contributor to the newspaper Socialist Resistance. He was one of the co-ordinators of the international petition against the expulsions of Heloisa Helena and her comrades from the PT last year.*

and meat to countries such as China and the US. 3.5 million hectares of rain forest have fallen victim to this agricultural export policy, despite Lula's protestations of ecological good faith.

### PT'S DRIFT TO THE RIGHT

The beginning of the PT's rightward evolution can be traced back to the defeat of the Sandinistas and other anti-imperialist movements from 1989 onwards. Moreover, the trade unions and the Christian base communities of the poor which had been the bedrock of the PT in the early eighties were weakened during the nineties by the effects of savage neo-liberal policies in the urban and industrial centres. With the decline in grassroots activity, bureaucratisation started to become a problem.

The imaginative strategy of the participatory budget helped the PT, including its left wing, to regain the initiative at the municipal level. The PT became associated through the World Social Forums in Porto Alegre with a new type of popular democracy. However, the participatory budget strategy could be — and was — used to encourage people to accept that their power to change the workings of capitalism was strictly limited. It also gave another impetus to the bureaucratisation of the party as hundreds of PT members became municipal functionaries.

The PT congress of 2001 affirmed the party's left traditions, but the leadership defied this congress when it took the fateful decision to fight its 2002 election campaign in alliance with bourgeois parties and on vague minimalist slogans. Once in office, Lula and his supporters let themselves be guided by the policies of finance minister Antonio Palocci (a PT member) and the new director of the Central Bank (ex-Boston Bank) Henrique Meirelles.

The determination of the PT leaders to go down the neo-liberal road was shown by their decision in December 2003 to



P-SOL founders Heloisa Helena, senator (left) and Luciana Genro, federal deputy.

## P-SOL has set itself the task of becoming the working-class, socialist alternative to the PT.

expel senator Heloisa Helena and deputies Luciana Genro, Joao Baba and Joao Fontes from the party for opposing the pension reforms, in spite of a major protest campaign including an international petition. Heloisa Helena is a member of Democracia Socialista (DS), the Brazilian section of the Fourth International. Her

expulsion was particularly significant, partly because the comrades of DS were instrumental in founding the PT and in developing the participatory budget in the south of Brazil and partly because she is a nationally known and genuinely popular figure.

The four MPs, once expelled, put their names to a public statement calling for a new party. Some historic figures in the PT, such as the sociologist Chico de Oliveira, also put their names to this statement. The new party took the name P-SOL (the Portuguese acronym incorporates "sol", which means "sun").

P-SOL has set itself the task of becoming the working-class, socialist alternative to the PT. Its first congress in June was

attended by 800 comrades from 22 Brazilian states. Reportedly there was a mix of trade unionists, students, intellectuals and members of the landless movement, and women were well-represented. Admittedly the conference was not delegate-based, but the new party seems to have attracted an important section of the activist vanguard and developed a certain momentum.

So will the sun of P-SOL rise and the star of the PT fade, as Luciana Genro put it at a recent meeting in London? The adherence of Heloisa Helena to P-SOL (along with her comrades from Red Liberty, a public faction of DS) may well prove key in giving the party an appeal beyond that of the existing revolutionary left. During her run-ins with the PT leadership last year the slogan "Lolo para presidente" ("Lolo for president") acquired some currency. Lolo is Heloisa's nickname and the slogan was a parody of "Lula para presidente", a slogan from the PT's election campaign in 2002.

But more important in the long term for building a mass base is 1) the new party's commitment to a democratic internal life where the rights of tendencies are respected and where individuals who are not part of any tendency can feel at home, and 2) its commitment to fighting for clear anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist demands, whilst avoiding ultra-left purism.

Many of its demands are transitional: in other words, they start from today's

consciousness of what needs to be done, but would, if adopted by a mass movement, create a dynamic which would potentially be revolutionary. These include: no payment of the external debt — break with the IMF; redirect public funds to health, education and infrastructure; nationalise big firms; reduce the working week to 40 hours with no loss of pay; index salaries to inflation; support for occupations by the landless; imprison landowners who employ armed thugs; solidarity with the people of Venezuela against US imperialism.

### CHALLENGES FOR THE LEFT

The new party thus represents a wish to return to the original character of the PT — a broad, democratic and militant anti-capitalist party, within which revolutionaries can organise — with a sharply clarified programme.

Whether in practice the new formation can implant itself in the trade unions, the landless movement and the organisations of the poor remains to be seen. The strikes of public sector workers against the government's pension reforms last year represented the beginning of a rupture between the PT and part of its base which can perhaps be positively exploited. However, the immediate test for P-SOL is whether it can obtain the 440,000 signatures necessary to register as a legal party and stand in elections.

At the same time, many socialists have decided to stay in the PT. This includes the majority of DS, which decided at its November 2003 congress (before the expulsions) to fight to win the party's rank and file to a left opposition to the government. However, the decision of DS and other socialists, such as Left Articulation, to maintain a presence in the Lula administration (the minister of agrarian reform, Miguel Rosseto, is a DS member), can only damage the prospects for building such an opposition and will not be understood by the working-class movement, either in Brazil or internationally. A positive exit strategy from the government is now needed, but it has to be said that the signs are not promising. Shamefully, only five left PT deputies voted against the government's minimum wage proposals (out of an initial 21 who promised to oppose it), and most of the left PT deputies backed the government in a recent corruption scandal by refusing to vote for an enquiry.

By June this year, according to James Petras, support for Lula's policies was down to one-third of the Brazilian population. But this will not automatically translate into support for the left, which must act quickly if it is to combat the spread of cynicism among the PT's supporters and ex-supporters. Whatever tactics are chosen, it will be important to maintain and build

links between P-SOL and the remaining principled elements of the PT left, particularly when it comes to unity in action against future government offensives, such as Lula's plans to limit the right to strike. Inside or outside the PT, the priority must be to construct a fighting socialist alternative to Lula. ★

See also documents, articles and links available at [www.alencontre.org](http://www.alencontre.org) (French-language site) and [www.marxsite.com](http://www.marxsite.com) (mainly English). P-SOL's website, in Portuguese, is at [www.psol.org.br](http://www.psol.org.br) On Lula's policies, see James Petras, "Year Two: Deepening and Extending Neo-Liberalism" at [www.rebellion.org](http://www.rebellion.org)

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# Corporate U and student dissent

BY DAN FREEMAN-MALOY

As the influence of York University's corporate constituency increases, the campus is incrementally being geared towards production of raw material for the knowledge economy. The meaningful relationships that could develop into serious, progressive social organization are being stifled. Instead, students are expected to focus on personalized ambitions, to see themselves in isolation, and to pursue individual solutions to collective problems. This political culture is being nourished by York's officials.

The administration is working to erode students' collective power, and to weaken student relationships with organized workers, Third World liberation movements, and other dissident social forces. It is simultaneously revealing its crude connections with the very centres of corporate and military power that are the most obvious targets of dissent. The present challenge is to preserve York as a free organizing space, while deepening the student movement's solidarity with the dynamic off-campus forces that are clashing with these oppressive institutions.

My expulsion from York University at the end of the academic year 2003/4 highlighted some of the obstacles and opportunities we face in pursuing these objectives. I should first point out that York has witnessed an intense backlash to progressive organizing this past year. In spring 2003, York students mobilized *en masse*, contributing importantly to resistance against Canadian participation in the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. These mobilizations included a student strike on March 5, and stressed solidarity with the ongoing Palestinian uprising. For the academic year 2003/4, York's right wing organized to retaliate.

On September 15, 2003, an on-campus speaking event featured an acting state criminal, Israeli Minister Natan Sharansky.

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Dan Freeman-Maloy is an undergraduate student at York University and an activist with *En Camino* ([www.en-camino.org](http://www.en-camino.org)).

York University President Lorna Marsden introduced him as "a symbol for the struggle for human rights wherever people are oppressed." Ten days later, an event titled "Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Appreciation Day" was hosted on campus by a right-wing student group (this group took over student government some months later).

Parallel (and connected) to these developments, the expansion of corporate power on campus was continuing apace. Shortly after Natan Sharansky was greeted by York's

Bankers Association and so forth. The guests at the party "enjoyed a sumptuous sushi bar compliments of Henry Wu, president of Metropolitan Hotels and a member of the York University Foundation Board of Directors." Henry Wu, meanwhile, was in the process of seeking to repress an organized upsurge of workers at this very hotel.

In April 2004, President Marsden sent me a letter, barring me from the school and threatening to charge me with trespassing if I set foot on campus at any point in the next three years. With neither legal nor political legs to stand on in justifying this repression, she has since been forced to back down, and I have returned to campus. But the specific allegations made in justifying her attempt merit attention.

Firstly, I was charged with using a megaphone at two on-campus Palestine solidarity demonstrations (one of these in response to "IDF Appreciation Day," cited above). Across North America, campus crackdowns on Palestine solidarity are, of course, common fare. More surprisingly, I was to be punished for my participation in a demonstration in February 2004, organized by the Metropolitan Hotel Workers Committee at their downtown Toronto workplace. Student-worker solidarity, in particular the sort that takes place off campus, is seldom targeted so crudely by University administrations; that it was in this case contains some central lessons.

Higher-ups in the Metropolitan Hotel are evidently worried by the dynamic model of rank-and-file organizing exemplified by the Workers Committee, and the threat posed by its potential growth; University administrators, for their part, are eager to stamp out the Palestine solidarity work that has been galvanizing campuses. The elite networks between these institutions are putting increasing priority on blocking the grassroots alliances that could strengthen both movements. It is now up to us to capitalize on the arrogance with which elites are making their aims public, and to work to make their worst fears a reality. ★



PHOTO: JOHN BONNAR: [HTTP://JOHNBSMUG.COM](http://JOHNBSMUG.COM)

Emily Tang, member of the Metropolitan Hotel Workers' Committee.

President, the University released its 2003 "Report to Donors". The Report described a party that had been thrown some months before, honouring York's wealthy constituents – Miles S. Nadal, the Imperial Oil Foundation, Claridge Israel (owned by Charles Bronfman of Canada), Shell Canada Ltd, the Canadian Defense and Foreign Affairs Institute, the Canadian

# 'We don't need better prisons for women'

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
EX-PRISONER GAYLE HORII

Television images of women, shackled and strip-searched by an all-male "cell extraction" team in 1994, led to public outcry at the degrading treatment of federal women prisoners at the Prison 4 Women (P4W) in Kingston. P4W was closed in 2000 and five regional prisons were built across Canada. Despite hopes that these new prisons would improve the lives of women prisoners, unfortunately there have only been cosmetic improvements. From the architecture, to the Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) co-optation of feminist language, these changes serve only to disguise the harsh injustices that women endure in Canadian prisons. The abuses continue behind bars, with little media attention.

Each year women prisoners file grievances against the CSC, and on March 8, 2001 women's rights groups came together to file a collective complaint of discrimination on behalf of federally sentenced women.

Concerns include discrimination based on race, gender and disability and an unjust security classification system. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has issued a report making 19 recommendations supporting the women's complaints. To date, CSC has not implemented a single recommendation.

**ANTONIA BAKER** spoke with **GAYLE HORII**, co-founder of Strength in Sisterhood, a Vancouver-based organization of women prisoners and ex-prisoners. Gayle rejects the concept that prisons can be reformed or "humanized". In her eyes, "a prison is a prison is a prison." Gayle speaks from an experience of seven years in the federal system.

**AB:** Can you give us some background on the current complaint made on behalf of federally sentenced women?

**GH:** One of the things we have to do is go back to the very beginning of the history of incarceration of women in Canada. The systemic discrimination goes back to the earliest records, prior to the opening of P4W in 1934. Before it was constructed, women were imprisoned in a section of the Kingston Penitentiary for Men where they suffered floggings and starvation. Since its opening, there have been 19 commissions, committees, delegations and task forces

that recommended P4W be closed, and that's all due to the degrading treatment of women. But the irony of women's incarceration is the fact that prior to P4W, women were housed in men's penitentiaries. And that's exactly what the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has returned to doing to women.

In 1995, they began transferring women to men's prisons. That's turning the clock back 60 years. While most women have since been transferred to the new regional prisons, women are still being held in two men's prisons, in Quebec and Nova Scotia. This particular [human rights] complaint is a take off on all the other complaints that have happened, yet never before have so many women's groups joined together to support federally sentenced women inside.



ILLUSTRATION: PETE COLLINS

Illustrator Pete Collins is a prisoner at the Bath Institute in Kingston.

**AB:** I find it disturbing how women are over-classified in terms of security. The CSC uses a scale where they look at criteria such as whether a woman has been physically or sexually abused, whether she held a job prior to incarceration, and the more needs the woman has, the higher CSC rates her security classification level. In other words, the more a woman is disadvantaged in society, the more dangerous CSC considers her to be to the public. It's ludicrous. The result is that the woman is held in maximum-security. Essentially she's punished for being poor and abused. Can you tell us more about this?

**GH:** Yes, that's exactly true. Unfortunately it's one of the things that backfired when the Task Force members wanted the

Antonia Baker coordinates Prisoners Justice Day (PID) radio programming at CKLN 88.1 fm and is a member of the PID organizing committee.

programming and anything to do with the incarceration of women to be “women-centered.” They said that the way they classify men wasn’t applicable to women because women weren’t normally the same danger or threat as men are. So CSC basically sort of turned that on its ear, and decided to look at the needs of women. In the needs list, [they consider whether] a woman was unemployed prior to incarceration, if she didn’t have a bank account, if she hadn’t gone to the dentist, if she had suffered any sexual or physical abuse, if she had an unstable relationship. All of these things would be considered high needs. And from there the woman became high risk. And now she is determined to be maximum security because of that high risk. And you back that up and the only thing is that she had high needs! Well, how many people today who aren’t even in prison don’t have a stable family relationship? Aren’t employed? Haven’t been to the dentist for a while because they can’t afford it? And so on. It’s a whole different kind of discrimination that they’ve applied in their “Management and Assessment of Women”. And it’s totally wrong.

**AB:** Can you talk about women who are classified as maximum, what they experience?

**GH:** Women that were maximum security were transferred into the women’s units in men’s prisons originally and now they’ve

been sent to the newly constructed maximum-security units in the regional prisons. What’s happening is that they have four levels of maximum security that they have to go through – men don’t have to do any of this. They’re handcuffed and shackled and accompanied by two guards before they can even leave their “unit” to go to the gym.

At the same time the rest of the population is prevented from leaving their units. In other words, they’re locked down.

It’s creating a huge amount of dissention within the prison itself. The maximum-security women don’t want their sisters to be put out. It’s a very unfair situation. The CSC are using maximum-security women to frighten the other women, saying number one, these are dangerous women, and number two, [this is] what we’ll do to you if you don’t do what we want you to do. This is another part of the discrimination that’s going on and this is a new situation, this has just started.

**AB:** Justice Arbour held a commission of inquiry into the incidents at P4W. Has the Canadian government and CSC implemented any of her recommendations?

**GH:** Well, it’s a lot of window dressing really. One of the most important recommendations she made was that all Aboriginal women are able to go into the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge in Saskatchewan [one of the five regional prisons] and CSC has stopped that. They claim that they allow medium-security women, but in fact there’s only minimum-security women going there. Unfortunately, most of the Aboriginal women are classified maximum. So very few are in there. In fact, it’s my understanding that half of the beds there are empty. It’s mostly maximum security that the Aboriginal women are held in. And even though there’s a new program strategy plan where they say they’re going to try and have Aboriginal people delivering “Aboriginal Programs” that’s not the case right now, and I doubt that’s going to be the case.

*“At least 25 percent of women are serving more time than they need to serve. And that’s because there’s nothing in the community for them to go to.”*

**AB:** So a lot of Aboriginal women are classified as maximum, but I’m guessing that it has a lot to do with how CSC assesses their needs and then over-classifies them, interpreting that they pose a risk to the community when really all they need is support.

**GH:** Exactly, that’s exactly it.

**AB:** I don’t think that people often realize that women prisoners are still being shackled, handcuffed and strip-searched – that abuses against women prisoners are still going on even after the outcry at what happened at P4W. What are your thoughts on this?

**GH:** Unfortunately things are still going on. Justice Arbour said that men should never be permitted to strip search women ever again, and the CSC will say that they aren’t, but you will see in their own directives that men are not permitted to strip search women unless it’s an emergency. So we have all of these qualifications that the CSC uses in order to justify or claim that they’re following the laws. We’re advocating that an outside advocacy council be formed so that at least women’s organizations could go into the prison and try to intervene prior to any use of force.

Women are constantly under threat of men actually violating them. Men are still going onto women’s units and catching them when they’re coming out of the shower naked. At least in P4W, if a man were coming on the range, there’d be a noise because the end gate’s going to open, and everybody would yell out, “Man on the Range”. But in these small units the male guards can just walk right in the door and the women don’t even know they’re coming. Things are worse now than they were when I was in Kingston.

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Initiated by the Women's Caucus of the New Socialist Group



**AB:** When a woman is finally released from prison, what options, if any, are available to help her reintegrate into larger society?

**GH:** Here's another serious problem. There is nothing going on in the community for federally sentenced women when they're released. And it's basically if the woman has family, she's lucky to have some support and some resources.

The women inside are not receiving any kind of training or education that they can actually use when they get outside. There are one or two satellite apartments in Canada, and they're starting to have what they're calling home placements where women on day parole can possibly live with a family that qualifies. For the majority of women this is not the case, and so women end up doing a lot more time. In fact,

CSC's own statistics show that up to 22 percent of women are not out on their earliest date because there are delays for paperwork. And part of the paperwork is because there's no bed for them to go to. That figure doesn't even include the women in BC. At least 25 percent of women are serving more time than they need to serve, and that's because there's nothing in the community for them to go to.

**AB:** You're a lifer on parole. What can you share about your own experience leaving prison?

**GH:** I did seven years, but I was fortunate to have family and friends and community people waiting for me. It even took me two years to feel like I was back into this world.

It's hard to explain the kind of paranoia you feel, about everybody must know, I must look a certain way. You're so used to being counted and eyeballed, that it's very difficult to feel that you are at liberty. And as a lot of people say, you don't have liberty unless you have economic liberty. So most people coming out are extremely impoverished. They don't have money. I was a lot luckier than most people, and that's one of the reasons why I got involved with co-founding this group Strength in Sisterhood, to try to provide a voice for women, and to network with other organizations to find some resources for these women.

**AB:** One of the key areas you're working on is decarceration. How does that work?

**GH:** What we're trying to say is that the majority of women serving time, in fact the majority of prisoners, are not dangerous at all. And these women should be in the community. Instead of building these maximum-security units, they could have released the minimum-security women to the community. I know women's organizations that have shelters that would readily take minimum women because in fact they're not a risk to the public or to other people. They are simply women who have been battered and who lack some assertiveness. All those women could have been released, about 25 percent of the population. And the medium-security women could move into the community on passes and do work release and education.

The maximum-security women, the ones that should be designated maximum-security, would be the ones who are and have been determined to be a risk to the public. They would be continuously assessed to see if that risk is still there. They could change a lot of the regional facilities right now; they could actually have community facilities. A lot of the reasons that women are inside is that they either lost control over their lives due to poverty or some kind of abuse that they weren't able to deal with. We're talking about women, many of whom are mothers. Their children, many of which are taken away. And the public will say they should be, these women are bad women. Well it's simply not true. I've met some of the most incredible, creative, giving, and genuine women inside the walls than I've ever met in my life. And many of us are still friends, 12 years later. ★

# Rethinking prison justice

**BOOK: *ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE?*  
BY ANGELA Y. DAVIS  
PUBLISHED BY SEVEN STORIES  
PRESS, 2003 (OPEN MEDIA SERIES)**

**REVIEWED BY  
PATRICK MCGUIRE**

In 1998, a conference entitled *Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex* in Berkley, California brought together over three thousand participants and an impressive selection of presenters and organizers. Angela Y. Davis, former political prisoner, author and currently professor of History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz, was one of the 25 core conference organizers. Her new book, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* is a series of short reflections drawn from her discussions at the conference and subsequent collaborative work on prison issues. As part of its Open Media series, Seven Stories Press has once again published a small yet powerful book of great relevance to those of us who envision and struggle to create a radically different future.

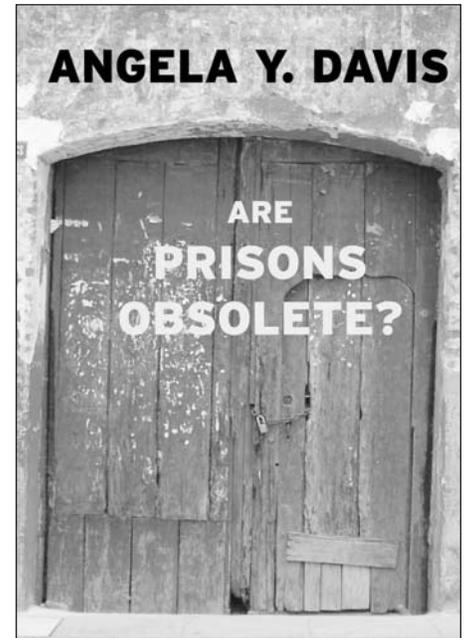
## GOAL

*Are Prisons Obsolete?* begins by asking prison activists, “which is your goal: Prison Reform or Prison Abolition?” Should effort be spent ameliorating the current prison justice system or should we begin re-thinking the prison and the central role it plays in an out-dated and ineffective “correctional” apparatus? Not surprisingly, Davis affirms the latter choice. Each chapter of *Are Prisons Obsolete?* thus focuses on one aspect of imprisonment and the prison system to demonstrate that

they are by design racist, sexist and classist. In this fashion, they are beyond reform and are obsolete.

In chapter two, Davis examines the racial dynamics of prisons in the US in depth. Taking a long historical view, Davis traces the connections between slavery as a racialized system of unfree labour and the convict lease system utilized by prisons. While the US Constitution outlawed involuntary servitude, it allowed forced labour in prisons, in effect allowing for the forced exploitation of African-American labour during the reconstruction era and the early 20th century. Newly “freed” Blacks found themselves quickly snared by Jim Crow laws and imprisoned in institutions that could lease them out to private corporations for profit maximization. This exploitation was not an aberration, but rather a systemic pattern that continues today in the form of a dramatic over-representation of people of colour in prison and their modern-day use as a captive labour force.

The gendered structuring of the prison system is the focus of chapter four. Davis points out that although women’s imprisonment has always represented a fraction of male incarceration rates, women are currently the fastest growing prison population. Further, Davis provides examples of bizarre “power feminism” in action such as female prison administrators increasing punishment and repression of women prisoners in order to be “equal” with men’s institutions. Most powerfully, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* touches on the rampant and systemic sexual assault and abuse of women prisoners. Through comments, groping, rape and, in particular, unnecessary strip searches and cavity searches, the prison system routinely violates the rights of women to control their bodies. A



growing number of feminist prison activists both within and outside of bars are building an analysis of these forms of sanctioned “state sexual assault”.

When Davis turns her attention to the privatized nature of prisons today, her book is at its most articulate and interesting. Building on the idea of a “Prison Industrial Complex” originally proposed by social historian Mike Davis, Angela Davis briefly describes the intertwined and self-perpetuating relationships between corporations, government, correctional communities and the media. In this “brave new world” of corporatized punishment, an entire profit-making industry is built around the state’s ability to warehouse human beings and squander social potential. From massive contractors who secure prison construction projects, to corporations like VitaPro Foods of Montreal who supply meat substitutes, there are a huge array of enterprises that exist simply to service what Ward Churchill has called “an ever-expanding penal archipelago”. This is to say nothing of the privatized prisons run by companies such as the Corrections Corporation of America and Wackenhut Corporation that make more money for

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every new person incarcerated; or of the rapidly growing use of cheap non-union prison labour for a myriad of tasks such as building furniture for educational facilities (ironic given that education programs in prisons are almost entirely dismantled), sewing underwear or booking airplane flights.

The Prison Industrial Complex also enjoys a symbiotic relationship with its namesake, the Military Industrial Complex. Both industries enjoy cozy and heavily subsidized relations with government while swapping ideas regarding the development of new technologies for control and brutality. For example, the Sandia National Laboratories was experimenting with a dense foam that could be used to incapacitate prisoners, while the Stinger Corporation was developing “smart guns” that can only be fired by their owner. Along with the proliferation of Super Maximum Security or Supermax prisons in which prisoners are locked down 23 hours a day, it is clear that the Prison Industrial Complex is specializing in creating more oppressive conditions that are further and further away from the much-vaunted but seemingly abandoned goal of prisoner rehabilitation.

## HISTORY

Of particular interest is the history of the Prison Industrial Complex’s development as a response to globalization and the de-industrialization of North America in the 1980s. Hundreds of thousands of workers became surplus labour fit for incarceration. Also, as major industries shut down or re-located, entire communities began looking for replacement industries, and prisons appeared as a stable, non-polluting alternative that could guarantee employment. At this stage the media enters to whip up the law and order hysteria fueled by the US government’s ‘war on drugs’. Despite the decrease in virtually all types of crime, harsher penalties such as “Three Strikes” and mandatory minimums were introduced once the populace was soaked in fear by the depiction of racialized criminal “others” on the evening news and television shows such as “COPS”. Thus, Davis argues “the prison has become a black hole into which the detritus of contemporary capitalism is deposited.”

*Are Prisons Obsolete?* concludes with a brief discussion of “Abolitionist Alternatives”. Rather than focusing on one



PHOTO: JOHN BONNAR: HTTP://JOHNBSMUG.COM

Prisoner Justice Day in Toronto, August 2004.

alternative system, Davis compellingly advocates for a constellation of alternative strategies that would enable our societies to move beyond prisons. Initiatives such as the demilitarization of schools, accessible health care (particularly mental health and drug addictions programs), decriminalization of drug use and reconciliatory justice programs are all suggested as practical and holistic options for decarceration. Most importantly, Davis argues against falling into the trap of simply tweaking the existing prison system, and promotes instead the building of an “antiracist, anticapitalist, antisexist and anti-homophobic” movement capable of challenging the very foundations of the prison system’s legitimacy as a social institution. Despite the unfortunate brevity of this section of the book, the reader is amazed by the practicality of Davis’ suggestions.

In spite of all its strengths, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* does have some weaknesses. First, although Davis writes from an internationalist perspective and includes examples from countries outside the US, there is still an overwhelming focus on the USA. While this is entirely logical given that 20% of the world’s prison population is behind bars in America, Canadian readers would do well to follow up with readings on the domestic scene. That said, Davis’ analysis of the racialized nature of imprisonment could be roughly but equally applied to the drastic overrepresentation of Aboriginal prisoners

in Canada and to prison’s function as an expression of colonialism. Secondly, while a listing of a dozen prison activist organizations is included as an appendix, a short list of suggested readings would have been very easy to insert, giving readers further access to materials on prison abolition and the function of prisons. Titles such as Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, Christian Parenti’s *Lockdown America* and Ruth Morris’ *Prison Abolition* come immediately to mind.

Thirdly, and most importantly for those of us trying to build socialism from below, Davis says virtually nothing on the prison’s function as an appendage of the State. Given the horrific experiences of prisons, secret police and capital punishment carried out by so-called “socialist” governments during the 20th century, radicals need to engage in a project of critical reflection that envisions a democratic and participatory system of justice. Unfortunately, readers will have to look beyond *Are Prisons Obsolete?* for this critique. All shortcomings aside, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* is an excellent short analysis of prisons and it builds a very convincing case for prison abolition. Further, readers who appreciate Angela Davis’ conversational tone would do well to follow up by getting her earlier spoken word CD *The Prison Industrial Complex* which is available through Alternative Tentacles Records and AK Press. ★

## PRISON AND HARM REDUCTION

# What's the hold up?

BY ANNE MARIE DICENSO

It has been over 12 years since a group of concerned AIDS activists, ex-prisoners, and members of community-based groups first gathered in a Toronto kitchen to discuss the need for harm reduction in Canadian prisons. In those early days, they came up with a comprehensive strategy on AIDS in prison that looked at issues that had never before been addressed in the Canadian prison system. It was the birth of PASAN (Prisoners with HIV/AIDS Support Action Network), the first ever prison and AIDS organization.

In the early 1990s when PASAN was created, the rates of HIV infection in the prison system was known to be 10 times that of the general public. Today, the situation has worsened, with prisoners not only at risk of contracting HIV from the lack of clean needles, unsafe tattooing and consensual unprotected sex or rape inside federal prisons; they also risk contracting HCV, the virus that causes Hepatitis C – a disease with equally debilitating consequences.

Current statistics show that approximately 77% of prisoners use drugs, with between one to two per cent testing positive for HIV and an alarming 29-40 per cent contracting HCV. With the increase of police repression in Canada and the impact of the American government's "War on Drugs" the numbers of people being incarcerated will continue to grow, along with HIV and HCV rates. It is a needless epidemic – virtually ignored by the general public and politicians – yet so easily curbed by a concept that (drug) users have understood for years – harm reduction.

Harm reduction is a practical approach to drug use and one that recognizes that quitting drugs may not be realistic for everyone. It is user-driven, non-judgmental, community-based and broad-based in terms of its attempts to take into consideration and address whole systems which alienate, isolate and marginalize people and contribute to increased drug use.

Harm reduction responds to the health

risks of users and works with them to identify potential risks and decrease drug-related harm. It recognizes drug users as part of a larger community, protecting and improving community health as a whole.

Harm reduction recognizes that two different types of problems result from illegal drugs. One set of problems results from the negative effects of drugs on an individual and the other from society's efforts to criminalize drug users and elimi-

**Although activists have been calling for needle exchange programs in prisons since 1992, no Canadian prison system had started a program as of 2004.**

nate drugs. Harm reduction is not solely about changing individuals' behaviour. It is also about societal change. It challenges society to rethink how drug use is seen and recognizes that many of the harms associated with drug use are caused by prejudice and a "war on drugs" approach to drug policy that criminalizes – rather than helps – drug users.

Harm reduction has been around as a concept for a number of decades but it is only since the late 1980s that it has been

recognized by public health professionals and community groups as a key strategy in reducing the transmission of HIV and HCV. As a result of this wider public acceptance, users outside prisons today have much better access to free needles, safer crack kits (for smoke-able drugs), methadone and condoms.

But inside Canada's prisons, the story is quite different. The federal correctional system is made up of 52 prisons across Canada with each institution housing men and women who are serving sentences of two years or more. There are five regions mandated to operate these federal correctional facilities: the Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies and the Pacific. Each region is accountable to Correctional Services Canada's (CSC) National

Headquarters in Ottawa.

Although there are many ways to reduce the transmission of HIV and HCV, there are only a few measures that can be implemented inside federal prisons to bring about those changes. Since 1992, PASAN activists have been fighting for federal prisons in Canada to implement four main harm reduction measures. These include: bleach distribution, safer tattooing, syringe exchange and methadone maintenance. All were supported by The Expert Committee

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Anne Marie DiCenso is the Executive Director of PASAN

on AIDS and Prison, a Correctional Services Canada funded study on prisons and HIV/AIDS, published in 1994.

**Bleach Distribution:** Although not widely used in the community any more, bleach continues to be an important harm reduction strategy in federal prisons. As there are no needle exchange sites in Canadian prisons, bleach is used by users to clean their works (drug paraphernalia). It is not clear, however, if bleach is 100% effective for cleaning homemade rigs, such as those used in prison, as no studies have been conducted to date. It is known, though, that bleach is not always effective in eradicating the HCV virus which lives outside the body much longer than HIV.

Bleach was not formally available in federal prisons until 1995 when a policy was issued by Correction Services Canada (CSC) requiring that "bleach be freely available, readily accessible and distributed in a way that ensures anonymity and minimizes risk of injury." At that time, it was also recommended by prison activists that full-strength bleach, together with instructions on how to sterilize needles and syringes, be made available to prisoners in all institutions.

Unfortunately, as time has shown, CSC policy has not always become CSC practice. Bleach distribution is still erratic for most federal prisoners. Bleach was originally intended to be made available to all prisoners so that no one would know whether prisoners were using it for cleaning their floors or doing laundry or to clean their works. However, since each institution can interpret policy as they see fit, many institutions put bleach out for prisoners only once a week, sometimes not at full strength and often given out in ways that correctional staff can see who is taking it and take note of perceived drug users. Many institutions also run out of bleach and it can take several weeks before it's available again. This situation leaves drug users with no choice but to clean their works with whatever they can find on their living units. Often this means some form of detergent which has no bleach in it. As prisoners often have to share their works with as many as 50 other prisoners, bleach is imperative in reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and HCV.

**Safer Tattooing:** With the wide availability of clean needles, sterilized equipment and the fact that tattoo shops must comply with numerous public health regulations,



**Safer tattooing strategies within prisons remains an issue for prisoners.**

getting a tattoo in Canada brings little risk. Not so in federal prisons. Tattooing has been a rite of passage for prisoners for decades and is an important part of prison life. But in federal prisons tattooing and tattooing equipment are still considered contraband (practices or material that are not allowed in federal prisons) and are confiscated if found and the owner punished. The result? Tattoos in prison are often done with used needles or other unsterilized equipment – despite the fact that tattooing without sterilized equipment is one of the major means of transmission of HCV.

Very little has been done on tattooing in prison to date and no studies are available on the issue. However, prisoners and activists have pushed for safer tattooing strategies for many years now. In 1996 the

**Not providing clean needles to prisoners when it is known that injecting drugs is occurring, is paramount to condoning the spread of HIV and HCV.**

Lifers Group, a groups of prisoners serving life sentences at Joyceville institution in Ontario, requested that a pilot tattooing project be implemented in their institution. This was following a study released earlier that year by Dr. Peter Ford, a prison and HIV/HCV specialist, showing approximately 40% of prisoners in that institution had HCV. The Lifers Group asked to have tattooing available to prisoners without it being considered contraband or the prisoners involved being charged. However, despite the support of Dr. Peter Ford and other activists, the pilot project was never implemented.

PASAN also published an article with the knowledge and assistance of many federal prisoners outlining what the best form of prison tattooing should be. This article was called "Driving the Point Home" and was released to the public in 2003. Finally, in 2004, CSC stated that they will implement one pilot tattooing project in each of the five federal regions in the next few months. Specifics on what these pilot sites will look like has not been clearly identified.

**Sterile Needles:** Needle and syringe exchanges have been one of the most important harm reduction issues for prisoners to date. Many prisoners start using injection drugs for the first time after becoming incarcerated and have found that not having access to clean needles is a serious problem. Although prisoners use

whatever drugs are available inside, drugs that can be injected are the most sought after as they go through your system faster, reducing the risk of being detected through urinalysis. Urinalysis is routinely used on prisoners to detect drug use, leading to reprimands for the prisoners who are caught and the possibility of serving more of their sentence inside. Using drugs that are less likely to be detected through urinalysis and that cannot be detected through smell (like smoke-able drugs) makes more sense when you are trying not to get caught. As prison life is difficult and corrections tends to incarcerate a large number of drug users, sharing rigs and other injecting equipment becomes a necessity for prisoners.

Although activists have been calling for needle exchange programs in prisons since 1992, no Canadian prison system had started a program as of 2004. The federal

prison system has been studying the issue for many years and created a committee in 1999 to develop recommendations for the federal government. This committee was made up of activists, correctional front line staff, health care professionals and correctional policy analysts. Although the group agreed that needle exchange was a viable option, and that a pilot project should be implemented, government officials did not act on the recommendation.

Correctional staff who oppose the distribution of needles in prison say it condones drug use. In reality, it is not an endorsement of drug use, but a concern for the health and safety of prisoners – and the broader health of the community given that most prisoners will eventually be released. Not providing clean needles to prisoners when it is known that injecting drugs is occurring, is paramount to condoning the spread of HIV and HCV. It

is paramount that needle exchanges be implemented as soon as possible in all prisons in Canada.

**Methadone Maintenance:** Methadone has been widely used to treat opiate users since the early 1960s. Although methadone for prisoners has been one of activists' main recommendations since 1992, methadone did not become available inside federal prisons until 1996. At that time, federal corrections introduced methadone maintenance phase 1, a treatment option only available to opiate users who had been on methadone while out on the street. Those who had taken up opiates like heroin while inside were not eligible. CSC admitted that this was not enough and planned to extend the distribution of methadone to all opiate users who qualified, whether or not they had previously been on methadone. The expansion of the program was delayed for three years, however, because of inadequate funding.

To date, methadone is available in federal prisons; however, there is a long and arduous process involved in qualifying for the program. As well, many prisoners cannot access the program as there are not enough doctors in corrections who are able to prescribe methadone to them.

Harm reduction continues to be an important and elusive issue for prisoners in federal prisons. Although some progress has been made in identifying harm reduction strategies and, in some cases, moving these strategies forward, major problems still exist. Prisoners face huge barriers to safer drug use which continues to affect their ability to live healthy lives. Without further action on this issue, more prisoners will become infected with HIV and/or HCV. This is a human rights issue. And it is an issue for people of colour, Aboriginal people, street involved people and poor people in general. In Canada, while 3% of the general population is Aboriginal, federal prisons admit that at least 20% of their population is made up of Aboriginal people. Statistics are not kept on the number of poor people and people of colour, but anecdotal information shows us that these populations are highly over represented in federal prisons. As activists and socialists, we need to renew our commitment to prisoners' rights. Without those of us on the outside working for change, we leave those on the inside to disease and perhaps death. The responsibility is ours, the time is now. ★



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# DRAWING DETENTION

## *A Prison Art Group for Women*

BY SIMA ZEREHI

A group of women and children are sitting around a large triangular table in a non-descript institutional setting. The table is littered with art supplies, paint, crayons, brushes and charcoal. Reggae music blasts in the background.

The conversation is loud and boisterous as Denise, a two year old girl, smears paint all over herself and the table in an attempt to decorate her canvas with her hand print. Some of the women are young, others old, and they come from all over the world. The conversation flows in Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, Hungarian, Hindi and above-all broken English, each language punctuated by laughter.

Despite the almost jovial nature of the gathering, this is not an ordinary art group. These women are all detainees at the Heritage Inn, an immigration detention centre in Toronto. The women are held in captivity for nothing more than minor immigration violations. Some came here as refugees fleeing persecution, torture, imprisonment or gender-based violence. Others came to Canada to work as domestic workers in wealthy Canadian homes or as farmers harvesting flowers. Some of these women have been in detention with their children for months. Apparently it is a crime to search for a better life for themselves and their families.

The Women's Art Group at the Heritage Inn has been meeting since the winter of 2003. The group is led by four activists from "No One is Illegal (Toronto)" and is run under the supervision of the Toronto Refugee Affairs Council. As the facilities are limited, a maximum of 15 women can participate in each art session. For many of the women in detention, the art group is

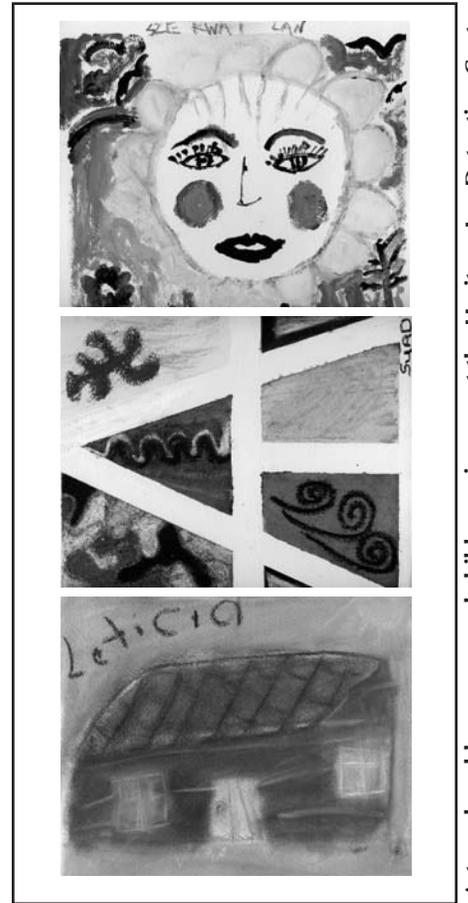
their only opportunity to interact with people outside of the detention centre. The art group was envisioned as a way to establish concrete links between immigrant/refugee rights groups and the people in detention.

Many of the women were arrested at airports and borders trying to enter Canada after long journeys through numerous countries. These women were shocked that their journey to Canada, which was supposed to mean safety and an end to persecution, ended in detention: "Why are we in jail? I am no criminal," exclaims one of the women. Many are detained for lack of identification, while others will not be permitted to leave without having family members or friends post large bail payments.

Other women were arrested after having lived in Canada for months, even years: "I was going to work, house cleaning, with my friend, it was a new job and we got lost. We knocked on the wrong door and this lady she called the police on us." Such stories are common at the detention centre. Most of the women were arrested by the police, rather than immigration officials. Many were arrested in their workplaces, others were reported by slumlords. Most disturbingly, a number of women were arrested for calling the police for protection during an incident of domestic violence.

The art class is a time when the women can get together and share their stories. Art serves as an ideal medium for this interaction. While drawing and painting, the women temporarily relax and try to forget their situation. The drawings reflect the pain and longing in their lives. Much of the work depicts scenes of their homeland, lush landscapes of Costa Rica and the Caribbean Islands, palm trees in the deserts of Iraq. Other pieces are of family members and loved ones.

The art brings the women, who would



Art produced by women and children prisoners at the Heritage Inn Detention Centre

otherwise have very little in common, together. In one corner of the room, Ling, one of the more long-term detainees, shows an eager group of Asian women how to create elaborate origami pineapples. The women break into a spontaneous assembly-line, taking on different tasks for the project. "We have made many," Ling says. I remember the dozens of origami pineapples decorating the first and second floor of the women's wing of the detention centre, each pineapple representing hours of work, adding up to weeks and months idling in detention.

Through their art they try to send messages to those outside of the detention centre about their conditions, as well as their desire to remain in Canada. Sometimes these messages are frustrating, as some women express their love for Canada, the very country that has criminalized them. Others express their anger at being detained. But the art provides a medium for the women to break through the prison walls with a powerful message that the prison walls must come down. ★

*Sima Zerehi is a member of No One is Illegal (Toronto) and the New Socialist Group. She helps run the art group for women.*

# *The history of revolution and the future of anti-capitalism*

BY SEBASTIAN LAMB

**A** CENTURY AGO, PROMINENT CAPITALISTS, POLITICIANS and writers in many countries warned that workers' revolution threatened "civilization." In 1919, many of Canada's rulers saw the Winnipeg General Strike as verging on revolution (unfortunately, although the working people of Winnipeg showed great unity and militant workers in other cities struck in solidarity with them, the country wasn't on the brink of revolution).

In Canada and most other advanced capitalist countries, to talk of revolution today seems utterly unreal. The real history of revolutions is buried. Most books and movies depict revolutions as eruptions of irrational violence whose inevitable result was tyranny. Today marketers use the term "revolutionary" to sell everything from anti-wrinkle cream to computers. The meaning of revolution isn't clear at all.

Nevertheless, anyone who wants to see capitalism replaced by a better kind of society – one profoundly democratic and geared to meeting people's needs in an ecologically sustainable manner – needs to cut through the confusion surrounding the idea of revolution. To do this, we need to look at the history of revolutions.

The word "revolution" has been used to refer to different things. In ancient times, it expressed the yearning of the poor for liberation. In the 1800s, after the French Revolution had shaken Europe and the Haitian Revolution challenged colonialism, revolution came to mean a radical change of society that would replace capitalism's private property and narrow individualism with different priorities such as human needs and the common good.

The 20th century saw many revolutions — perhaps most famously the Russian Revolution of 1917 — and other upheavals. Yet the fate of the Russian Revolution sowed enormous confusion and numerous misconceptions about revolution and socialism. Few people understood how a genuine popular revolution had indeed taken place, but that the isolated

and fragile rule of the working class supported by the peasantry was then subsequently destroyed from within. The Stalinist bureaucratic dictatorship that had consolidated itself by the end of the 1920s was the fruit of a counter-revolution, not the natural outgrowth of the revolution of 1917. This monstrous regime called itself "Communist" and used the language of revolution to justify exploitation at home and counter-revolutionary policies abroad. When it and others like it collapsed after 1989, many people concluded that revolution and an alternative to capitalism were now a thing of the past.

## POLITICAL AND SOCIAL REVOLUTIONS

TO SORT ALL THIS OUT, OUR STARTING POINT SHOULD BE to distinguish between two quite different kinds of revolution, which we can call political revolutions and social revolutions.

Political revolutions change the government or sweep away one set of state institutions (for example, those of a one-party regime or the personal rule of a dictator) and replace them with another (such as liberal democracy) without uprooting the power of the small minority of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and others who rule. Such revolutions may bring about real reforms, but they do not lead to a fundamental transformation of how society is organized.

The Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979 was an example of this kind of revolution. It involved considerable popular mobilization and an insurrection that toppled the brutal US-backed regime of Somoza. A radical nationalist government was formed by the Sandinista Front for National Liberation. It proceeded to carry out social reforms that improved the lives of people in the countryside and the cities. But the revolution never broke the power of the whole ruling class or replaced it with the direct democratic control of society by the country's workers and small farmers. Nicaraguan capitalists continued to control much of the economy. The US government armed and funded vicious right-wing "contra" forces to fight the Sandinistas. In 1990 the Sandinistas lost parliamentary elections, and a right-wing government took office.

Social revolutions are more radical than political revolutions.

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*Sebastian Lamb is an editor of New Socialist. An earlier version of this article, including references and an appendix that critically assesses the Leninist approach to socialist organization, can be found at [www.marxsite.com/possibility\\_of\\_revolution\\_and\\_th.htm](http://www.marxsite.com/possibility_of_revolution_and_th.htm)*



**Zapatista women: The Zapatista movement has struggled for recognition of the indigenous right to self-determination in Mexico.**

They don't just change governments or state institutions, they transfer ruling power in society from one class to another. Though all social revolutions have this in common, there have been several different kinds of social revolutions in the past four centuries.

One kind of social revolution promotes the development of capitalism. Such revolutions can be called bourgeois revolutions, although we shouldn't think that many bankers and factory-owners took to the streets themselves. The English Revolution of the 1640s and the French Revolution of the 1790s were this kind of revolution. Both involved struggles

A different kind of social revolution took place in a number of "Third World" societies in the 20th century.

among ruling-class factions and "middling" elements who mobilized the poor to serve their own interests. Significantly, radical movements of the poor also arose in these upheavals: the Levellers and Diggers in England and the sans-culottes in France. These revolutions eliminated social arrangements that stood in the way of the development of capitalism, which was a drawn-out process that took place over many decades.

A different kind of social revolution took place in a number of "Third World" societies in the 20th century. The main fighters in these revolutions were peasants, but these revolutions were led by militarized anti-imperialist parties that were not democratically run by peasants themselves. Where they were victorious, these revolutions of national liberation broke the power of much-hated rulers backed by imperialism. Unfortunately, control of society passed from landlords and capitalists to a new ruling class of "Communist" officials who established one-party states on the model of the USSR and set about developing national industries. Revolutions of this kind took place in China, Cuba, Vietnam and elsewhere.

#### **SOCIALIST REVOLUTION**

THERE IS ALSO ANOTHER KIND OF SOCIAL REVOLUTION, ONE that demonstrates the potential to establish the direct administration of social life by the democratically organised masses. These we can call socialist revolutions. Such revolutions are not started by revolutionary activists. They break out when

## DO COOPERATIVES CONTAIN THE SEEDS OF DUAL POWER?

Today, some anarchists talk about cooperatives, democratically-run community centres and the like as seeds of dual power, and believe that developing more of them is a revolutionary strategy. Unfortunately, dual power has never emerged this way, bit by bit. It is only in times of social crisis that wide layers of people create new institutions of democratic control to address practical problems of everyday life. In the past, dual power has arisen when people have organized themselves in response to challenges like the democratic coordination of a general strike, preparing to fight an impending coup, or organizing the distribution of food and the provision of public services when bosses withhold goods and services. Whatever the merits and drawbacks of setting up co-ops and self-managed spaces, this is not a strategy for revolution.

A socialist revolution is “an explosion of life,” to use a phrase of the Portuguese socialist Francisco Louçã, because it involves exploited and oppressed people rising up and taking control of their workplaces, communities and households. Listen to Louçã’s description of the Portuguese Revolution of 1974: “Women who did not resign themselves to obedience. Workers who wanted what was due to them: dignity, rights, and the products of their labour. And everyone wanted freedom, the right to information, to create, to know what was going on, to discuss, to decide.”

When this happens, masses of people begin to change, discovering that they are capable of doing things they never considered possible. There is an incredible ferment of ideas and all sorts of experimenting with new ways of organizing society as we unlearn what’s been drummed into us by centuries of oppression and alienation.

This underlines how different socialist revolutions are from other kinds of revolutions. Political revolutions don’t transfer power from one class to another. In bourgeois revolutions, even if risings of the poor took place the end result was one small minority class of exploiters replacing another. The same was true of anti-imperialist revolutions like the one in China in 1949.

In contrast, socialist revolutions break with thousands of years of class rule by putting the exploited majority in power. This democratic control of all aspects of society cannot be achieved by any party or armed minority acting as a substitute for the masses; it can only be established by the exploited and oppressed themselves. Unlike the development of capitalism, which could begin without capitalists running society themselves, a transition towards socialism can only begin after workers have come to power. Only then can the capitalist logic of production and distribution on a for-profit basis begin to be replaced with the democratically-planned production and distribution of goods and services to meet people’s needs – a process which cannot be completed within one country alone.

deep-rooted social crises prompt the ruled to resist in ways that make it impossible for the rulers to carry on as they have. The resistance of the ruled can take many forms, from workplace occupations by wage-earners to street demonstrations by working-class and poor women to uprisings of indigenous people.

Whether growing out of political revolution, anti-imperialist struggle or other kinds of social crises, this type of revolution is distinguished from all others by the masses creating new democratic institutions through which they begin to run society themselves. These are organizations of socialist democracy (sometimes called workers’ democracy). They can take many forms, including workplace committees, neighbourhood or community assemblies, and councils of delegates from many such bodies. All of them are mass organizations, meaning that broad layers of people participate in them; they are not organizations of radicals and militants alone.

When masses of people create such democratic institutions of the exploited and oppressed alongside the established state, a situation of dual power emerges. This means that new forms of democracy that express the power of the majority coexist with the capitalist institutions through which a small minority dominates society. Dual power poses the most revolutionary question: which class will run society?

For this reason, a ruling class and its state will do everything they can to co-opt or crush the new forms of democracy. This threat can only be dealt with if the institutions of socialist democracy become supreme and suppress capitalist power in state and society. This can open the way to the long process of building a self-managed, ecologically-sustainable society that is free of the sway of capital.

### REVOLUTIONARY BREAKTHROUGHS

The first experience of socialist democracy was the short-lived Paris Commune of 1871. The working people of that city rose up and took power into their own hands through a radically-democratic government of recallable delegates for two months before they were crushed by force of arms. The Commune made possible a breakthrough in socialist theory and strategy because it showed that, as Karl Marx wrote, “the working class cannot simply lay hold on the ready-made state-machinery and wield it for their own purpose. The political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation.” Marx recognized the importance of the Commune, hailing its grassroots democracy as “the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour.”

Since then, dual power has arisen on a number of occasions. In Russia in 1905 and again on a larger scale in 1917, workers and peasants set up new democratic institutions including councils (called soviets), factory committees, and committees of rank and file soldiers and sailors. These formed the basis of the workers’ and peasants’ power that was established in 1917 but eventually succumbed to bureaucratic counter-revolution from within. The revolution in Germany in 1918-1919 also saw councils of workers and soldiers established. There the reformist

Social Democrats and union officials remained the leadership of most of the workers' movement and were able to channel the council movement into an accommodation with the capitalist parliamentary state. In Spain in 1936-37, dual power existed in Catalonia but lack of decisive revolutionary direction among workers and peasants led to its demobilization and repression by the Popular Front government.

Dual power also existed in the Bolivian Revolution of 1952. Workers' councils were at the centre of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, crushed by the armed might of the USSR. In 1972-73, Chilean workers set up elected workplace-based committees called cordones, as well as some similar neighbourhood structures. Elements of dual power emerged in Portugal in 1974-75, and in Poland in 1981 before the Solidarity union movement was put down by Stalinist martial law. The popular committees and assemblies in France in 1968 and those created in Argentina after the uprising of late 2001 were not mass organizations of workers' democracy, but they pointed in that direction.

These and other experiences don't give us blueprints for the future. We don't know what future revolutions will look like. But we can draw some important conclusions from history that help us distinguish between what takes people closer to the establishment of socialist democracy and what moves in other directions. Two stand out:

ONE: Successful socialist revolutions will involve general strikes run democratically by workers themselves, mass demonstrations and insurrections.

Dual power emerges out of mass strikes and other mobilizations that display high levels of self-organization. For dual power to be resolved in favour of socialist democracy, capitalist state power must be broken.

TWO: A working class that doesn't democratically control all aspects of society can't be fully self-governing.

What working people don't run for themselves will be under the control of others. So if institutions of socialist democracy become the public power governing society but workers don't democratically run their own workplaces, working-class rule will be incomplete. Similarly, it isn't enough for workers to occupy their workplaces and take over neighbourhoods: they need to replace capitalist state power with their own organizations of grassroots democracy.



Poster from the Spanish Civil War, 1936 to 1939.

## REVOLUTION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

SOME PEOPLE MAY MORE OR LESS AGREE WITH THIS ANALYSIS OF the history of revolutions, but argue that socialist revolutions aren't going to happen again. After all, it's been some years since the self-organization of working people has developed into a situation of genuine dual power. Why should we believe that such revolutions will ever happen again?

The only serious and honest way to answer this is to begin by clearly acknowledging that there are no guarantees. However, we do know that waves of revolutions of various kinds punctuated the 20th century. In recent years, deep social crises leading to massive popular revolts have wracked Indonesia, Ecuador, Argentina, and

Bolivia. Class and other social struggles have intensified in many other countries. For instance, although the reforms of President Hugo Chavez and the movement in support of him among the people of Venezuela are not a revolution, it is entirely possible that confrontation between the US-backed anti-Chavez right-wing and the radicalizing masses could develop into a revolution of some kind.

Capitalism continues to produce crises. Millions of people in the "Third World" are being forced off their land and into working for wages. Water and other natural resources necessary to sustain human life are increasingly being turned into commodities that must be purchased. Economic power and naked military aggression are used to further privatization and profitable investment, as in Iraq today. Even in the richest imperialist countries, public services are being sold off and the conditions of work and life are deteriorating for the majority of people. Everywhere we are told that what is good for capital is good for us, a mantra that increasingly rings hollow for many.

These and other developments that prevent people from meeting their needs can create the conditions for huge mobilizations that shake society and startle complacent rulers. Although we cannot predict what kinds of struggles from below will break out in response to future crises, it would be rash to declare that we will never again see revolutions that will throw up forms of socialist democracy.

Moreover, in the era of capitalist globalization, a situation of dual power will likely be known and discussed internationally with incredi-

We can draw some important conclusions from history that help us distinguish between what takes people closer to the establishment of socialist democracy and what moves in other directions.



Revolutionary upheavals present and past. LEFT: Bolivia, 2003; RIGHT: Winnipeg, 1919.

ble speed. The experiences of its heights of democratic self-organization will be transmitted around the world and fuel discussion among anti-capitalists about how to change the world.

### ANTI-CAPITALISM AND REVOLUTION

AMONG PEOPLE WHO CONSCIOUSLY REJECT CAPITALISM, THERE are many different understandings of how capitalism could be changed or replaced, and what could and should replace it. Many people who don't hesitate to criticize capitalism for its many horrors do not in fact ultimately seek to abolish it but rather seek to regulate or reform it so that its objectionable features are eliminated (or at least held in check). For example, Susan George, an influential figure in the "movement of movements" against neoliberalism and war, argues for "vast injections of crisis-directed resources into the global economy" to promote environmental goals, reduce poverty and promote democracy. Others wish to see global capitalism dismantled in order to build a world of smaller-scale communities.

For supporters of socialist democracy, it is not global interconnectedness that is the problem, but the fact that global relations are organized in capitalist ways. Peasants are forced off their lands to make way for the building of mega-dams and for-profit health care replaces public care because the global economy is capitalist, not because it's global. Changing its scale won't make it any less profit-driven. It is this basic character that also explains why attempts to regulate capitalism cannot fundamentally change it. Mass struggles can wrest progressive reforms from national states and multinational institutions to assist "Third World" countries,

workers, women, indigenous peoples and other oppressed groups, and it is vital to build movements that fight for such reforms. But the rational and humane regulation of capitalism is impossible.

It is for this reason that the goal of anti-capitalists must be the abolition of capitalism, not its regulation or alteration. And it is the kind of social revolution that puts ordinary people themselves in control of society and sets off "explosions of life" that can open the way towards a society organized around democratic planning, cooperation, liberation from oppression and ecological sustainability. No radical government in the parliament of a capitalist state can open this road through a series of reforms – "onions can be eaten leaf by leaf, but you cannot skin a live tiger claw by claw" (RH Tawney). Nor can a seizure of power by a minority force acting in the name of the majority open the road to a democratic alternative to capitalism.

People who come to understand that capitalism must be replaced if humanity is to have a decent future need to decide if we are willing to make what French Marxist Daniel Bensaïd calls "the melancholy wager" that the revolutionary transformation of society is possible. There is no rational basis for proclaiming the inevitability of socialism. We can't have that kind of religious certainty. We don't even have reassurance that the odds are good. We can only look at the stakes and decide if we want to make a wager.

It is the kind of social  
revolution that puts  
ordinary people  
themselves in control  
of society.

Those of us who decide that there are good reasons for refusing to despair have the responsibility to try to make sure our political activity contributes both to meeting the needs of exploited and oppressed people today and to making

future possibilities more likely, even though we cannot be certain about what the future holds. This means patiently organizing in workplaces and communities to build collective resistance to neoliberalism, war and oppression and cultivating an organized current of activists committed to a long-term socialist strategy and the renewal of socialism for the 21st century.

There are good reasons to think that people will again create highly democratic forms of self-organization on a large scale – situations of dual power. But what does it take for such situations to be resolved in favour of socialist democracy? Again, we need to look at history.

## REVOLUTION AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

THE EXPERIENCE OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONS IN THE 20TH century have demonstrated that it is entirely possible for dual power to emerge, but for the ruling class to prevail. Only in the Russian Revolution of 1917 was the rule of the exploited and oppressed in the form of socialist democracy able to establish itself on more than a local scale with any degree of stability (a process of bureaucratic degeneration began within a year, for reasons that there is no space to explore here).

It's difficult to cut through the thicket of myths, misunderstandings, distortions and lies that have grown up around the Russian Revolution. But the basic picture is this: in Russia, a situation of dual power was resolved in favour of the workers and peasants because there were organized political forces deeply rooted within the self-organizing and rapidly-radicalizing masses that a) had a clear strategy for victory ("All Power to the Soviets!"), b) were capable of assisting people to draw the conclusion from their own experiences that if they wanted to win their basic demands they had to take power into their own hands, and c) were able to act decisively and take the steps required to break the power of the weakened ruling class in the major cities.

In other words, there was an organized and consciously-revolutionary minority with enough political clarity and influence to provide effective leadership in the situation of dual power. By far the most important of the organizations of revolutionaries (whose numbers grew enormously during the course of 1917) was the Bolshevik Party. In 1917, this party was changed by an influx of radicalized workers. The experience of revolution also proved that the Bolsheviks' theory about how revolution in Russia would unfold was partly wrong. But the party managed to reorient itself and adopted a strategy of fighting for the replacement of the Provisional Government, created after the overthrow of the monarchy, with the power of workers' councils. Other revolutionary forces either joined the Bolsheviks or allied with them during the course of 1917.

It's useful to contrast the Russian experience with the Spanish Revolution of 1936-1937 (wonderfully portrayed in Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom*). Many workers and peasants rose up in 1936 in response to a military coup against the newly-elected Popular Front government. Dual power existed in parts of Spain. Many workers and peasants were willing to struggle to defeat fascism and create a new society. Large

numbers considered themselves anarchist or Marxist revolutionaries. But most supported the Popular Front of reformist socialists, Stalinist Communists and liberal republicans, soon joined or backed by the leaders of the important anarcho-syndicalist union CNT and the anti-Stalinist Marxist party POUM. In the name of anti-fascist unity, the Popular Front leadership demanded that there be no anti-capitalist action. This led the Popular Front to demobilize workers' and peasants' militias, end factory and land occupations, refuse to grant independence to Spain's colonies, and ultimately, in 1937, repress the CNT and POUM. By 1939, the fascists had defeated the Popular Front.

There were revolutionaries in Spain who had clearly understood that the Popular Front's path was disastrous and who recognized that neither the leaders of the anarchist movement nor the POUM were pursuing an alternative strategy for victory. But these clear-sighted radicals (anarchists like the Friends of Durruti group, Trotskyists and the left wing of the POUM) were too few and divided to have much influence. If their forces had been larger and better organized, the outcome of the Spanish Revolution might have been different.

The conclusion that we should draw from these and other revolutions of the past is not that the Russian Revolution is a model that can be copied. Nor is it that the absence of a revolutionary party is the only reason why other revolutions were not victorious. However, the political leadership of influential organizations of socialist activists rooted within mass movements has an indispensable role to play in revolutions. In a situation of dual power, every political current in society will argue about how to resolve the crisis. The consciously-revolutionary minority must have a winning strategy for the establishment of socialist democracy, and be up to the challenge of actively helping to create majority support within the masses for going all the way. The success of future revolutions will depend in part on whether this lesson of the 20th century becomes part of the renewal of anti-capitalist politics in the 21st. ★

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# FIGHTBACK: SOLIDARITY CAUCUS

## *It's time to start changing our unions*

*A new grouping of union activists, the Solidarity Caucus, has been formed in British Columbia. The Caucus was organized in response to the failures of the leadership of the BC Federation of Labour and their role in the deal which ended this spring's Hospital Employees Union strike. Although the caucus and the context out of which it arose is specific to BC, it is an important example of how union activists can organize against bureaucratic leaderships that fail to advance labour struggles. It is thus relevant for union activists in other provinces experiencing similar issues. Below we print the Solidarity Caucus STATEMENT OF PURPOSE .*

IT'S TIME TO START CHANGING OUR UNIONS into fighting organizations that can meet the escalating attacks that have been coming our way for many years now. Doing that will require more than voting out one set of leaders and voting in another. This text intends to kick off the necessary discussion about what has been wrong for too long and what some real alternatives are.

British Columbia's labour movement has been crippled by a lack of vision, a lack of analysis, and bad internal and external politics. This was proved once again by the tragically unnecessary May 2 defeat of 43,000 courageous and defiant health workers along with tens of thousands of other workers who were poised to strike (or already striking) to give them effective support IN ACTION. But it wasn't just a defeat. It was a sell-out by leaders committed to an inadequate and therefore failing strategy.

The stakes in this fight were merely the Medicare system, the public sector's right to strike, thousands of union jobs and large-scale union-busting.

Oh yes, and looking beyond the immediate battle, there was also the continuing unimpeded ability of right-wing corporate and government attackers to further ravage health care, crown corporations, union rights, social services, public education, the elderly, children at risk, women, the poor, Native people, etc., etc., etc.

On May 3, most British Columbian workers awoke asking why the fight had been called off. How could we NOT stand and fight with such a clear-cut battle and such widespread – and growing – solidarity?

The how and why of this retreat – and of many less dramatic failures to fight back in

recent years – are contained in the analysis, vision and internal/external politics which have governed the leaderships and infrastructure of BC trade unions for decades. It runs like this:

1. The political pendulum swings back and forth from left to right. It is currently swinging right, but it will swing left again sometime in the future.
2. Labour's job is to keep the trade union movement together organizationally and hang on until the pendulum swings back our way.
3. The only way to (gradually) change the pendulum's direction and give it momentum once it has changed is through electoral politics – elect the New Democratic Party (NDP) and progressive municipal slates.
4. Small-scale, infrequent actions can be used to keep people involved, but large, coordinated, militant fightbacks – especially involving strike action – are to be avoided because they might alienate middle-of-the-road voters from unions and their NDP allies, thus weakening electoral chances.
5. If the members vote in convention or in local meetings for effective militant action, the leadership must ignore that and steer a moderate, ballot-box-oriented course – because the leaders understand these things, and the members don't.
6. Making alliances with progressive non-union social groups and organizations is necessary. But those forces must always be



**B.C. ferry workers on strike.**

guided by the dictates of labour leaders and never be treated as real partners. They must accept electoralism as the primary strategy. And they must NEVER be allowed to influence significant numbers of trade union members with other strategic options.

The problems with this analysis/vision/strategy are many, serious and becoming increasingly evident

1. The pendulum is no longer swinging freely. On international, national, regional, and local levels, the corporate agenda is holding sway. Profiteers and their governments have blocked the return swing using international trade rules, massive transfers of public wealth to private hands through privatization and tax-shifting, coordinated threats of capital strikes against any jurisdiction that gets out of line and, if nothing

else works, legislated gutting of democratic rights backed by police and military repression.

2. Preserving trade union organizations becomes increasingly problematic with escalating defeats. Union membership is reduced not just because of contract-shredding, massive layoffs in favour of low-wage contractors and right-to-work initiatives. It is also falling because, as former Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) President Dennis McDermott said a generation ago, “You don’t need a union to negotiate concessions.” Multiplying defeats bring anger, demoralization, disunity and a feeling that unions are irrelevant. And this is even before we worry about the New Zealand experience of having a (Labour) government virtually abolish union collective bargaining rights.

3. The NDP in government is not the working class in power. The power still resides in the corporate boardrooms and Wall Street bond-rating agencies. This is why past NDP governments have focused on debt and deficit reduction, broken strikes legislatively and cut welfare benefits. Not only that, but electing the NDP in 2005, even if that were certain and we could count on them entirely, would be too late to fight off the attacks since 2001 and those still to come before voting day.

4. Without a militant and mobilized union movement leading all workers in an effective fightback, any NDP government elected will continue to implement the corporate agenda, possibly at a slower pace with a “more human face.” Only real counter-pressure from working people can stop and reverse that dynamic.

5. After a generation of escalating defeats, union members who vote for militant action DO understand the stakes and strategic implications. They have witnessed the inadequacy of electoralism as a sole, over-riding strategy. Of course much more needs to be learned, and it can be learned through education, preparation and through struggle itself. Working people have proved this in many times and places. But this requires democracy, because democracy works. It works by bringing all of our intelligence, talents, skills, experiences and courage into the decision-making process. But where democracy really excels is when mistakes are made and must be corrected. The more involved everyone is in making decisions, the more

Without a militant and mobilized union movement leading all workers in an effective fightback, any NDP government elected will continue to implement the corporate agenda.

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*The individuals whose names appear below are supporting the views contained in this statement of purpose in a personal capacity. Organizations and unions are listed for identification purposes only.*

Maryann Abbs (member, CEP 468; community activist, Vancouver); John Ames (executive officer, BCGEU component 5, local 503; Vancouver and District Labour Council delegate; member Vancouver GMB IWW, Vancouver); John Black (former president, Malaspina Faculty Association [CIEA], Malaspina College, Nanaimo); Jim Brown (member, Telecommunication Workers Union, local 30, North Vancouver); Lisa Descary (member, B.C. Teachers Federation; school staff representative and activist, Richmond School District); Gretchen Dulmage (vice-chair, HEU/CUPE Childrens and Womens Hospital local 6010; VDLC delegate; member, VDLC executive, Vancouver); Claudio Ekdahl (executive member, BCGEU local 603; VDLC delegate; international solidarity and grassroots activist, Vancouver); Gordon Flett (union activist, Vancouver); Sandra Giesbrecht (shop steward and trustee, HEU Royal Jubilee Hospital local; delegate, Victoria Labour Council); Ken Hiebert (member, International Longshore and Warehouse Union, local 500, Vancouver); Paul Houle (shop steward and executive member at large, BCGEU local 603, Vancouver); Renee Kennedy (BC Nurses Union steward, White Rock); Barry Luty (activist, BC Nurses Union, Central Vancouver Region); David Maidman (member, Ironworkers local 712, New Westminster); John Martin-McNab (chair, HEU Salt Spring Isle Community Services Society); Andy Mathisen (member, IWA local 1-3567, New Westminster); Jack McCamy (2nd vice president, CEP local 298, Kitimat); Gene McGuckin (editor, The Pulper, CEP local 1129 and chair of bargaining committee, Burnaby); Michele Mishler (member, HEU, Richmond Hospital); Bert Munn (member, Hospital Employees Union, Vancouver); Will Offley (B.C. Nurses Union member and activist, Vancouver); Jeff Pazik (member, IWA local 1-3567; president, Woodworkers for a Fair Forestry Policy Society, Richmond); Darrell Pinkney (HEU chairperson, Kiwanis Lodge; chairperson, Representative HEU Equity Standing Committee, Nanaimo); Bob Peacock (chairperson, HEU Broadway Pentecostal Lodge local; member of HEU Provincial bargaining committee; former member of provincial executive, Vancouver); Rob Porier (member, Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union, local 40, Vancouver); Susan Roth (member, IWA Canada local 1-85; elected official and chairperson, Beaver Creek Improvement District, a local public corporation, Port Alberni); Susanne Shaw (member, CEP 514 and CUPE local 873, Port Alice); Sharyn Sigurdur (member, United Food and Commercial Workers Union; founding member, Members for Democracy [MfD], Mission); Bob Smith (editor, New Routes, CAW local 111, Vancouver); Gregg Steele (shop steward, HEU Royal Jubilee Hospital local, Victoria; solidarity and grassroots activist, Victoria); Rick Tait (member, Teamsters local 155, Vancouver); Dan Tkachuk (member CUPE 382, Greater Victoria School Board); John Tregilges (former chairperson, BCGEU local 503, Vancouver); Bob Wilson (member and trustee, CEP local 468; delegate to Victoria Labour Council); John Yano (member, HEU, St. Vincent’s Hospital local, Vancouver)

easily we can see what went wrong and what new directions need to be taken.

6. Real, equitable alliances with social groups and organizations must be forged to avoid the isolation of unions and a growing sentiment among non-union workers that unions are only out for themselves. As well, the struggles of those groups are truly our struggles. They are about the communities union workers live in alongside non-union workers. Equally crucial is the fact that large-scale, militant job action requires community participation in planning and execution so we can minimize the harm done to those who are our true allies. This does not mean giving non-union groups the power to tell union members when, how and why they go on strike. That is a red herring.

### NEW DIRECTION

To move toward a labour movement that is genuinely militant, democratic and accountable to its members we must seek to implement a new set of strategies – from the BC Federation of Labour through each of the affiliated unions down to the level of local unions.

The essential first step is to organize a broad grassroots opposition within our unions based on putting forward and continually improving new fightback tactics and strategies, on developing new modes of organizational functioning and electing leaders who will be accountable to the democratic decisions of the members.

As an absolutely necessary part of rearming our labour movement for the fights to come, we must challenge and replace the



Members of CUPE Local 15 and 1004 in front of Vancouver City Hall.

## What we saw in early May was a failure as significant as the 1983 sellout of the Solidarity movement.

leadership. This must not be done on the basis of likes or dislikes. It must be done on the basis of an analysis that is more accurate, a vision that is more combative, strategies that are more effective and successful and modes of functioning that can mobilize and unite our members and our non-union allies.

What we saw in early May was a failure as significant as the 1983 sellout of the Solidarity movement. While it was Premier Gordon Campbell who ordered HEU (Hospital Employees Union) back to work, it was the leadership of the BC Federation of Labour and its major affiliates who enforced that return to work without even a murmur about giving those brave workers the right to vote on the so-called deal. And it was those leaders' totally deficient politics, outlined above, that have allowed them to justify this betrayal to themselves and to us.

An effective and durable general strike may or may not have been a real possibility, but that's not the issue. It was possible to inflict a resounding defeat on the Campbell Liberals and their corporate backers. On May 2 we were on the brink of BC labour's biggest struggle in decades – a massive strike wave that could have driven a stake through the heart of the Liberals' privatization of health care services. We had the biggest chance in three years to defeat Campbell, and it was torn from our fingers by the capitulation of our own leaders.

The sell-out of HEU was only the most spectacular of the lead-

ership's betrayal, but there's no shortage of other examples. What about the silent complicity in the IWA (Industrial Wood & Allied Workers) raid on HEU? For over a year the leadership of the Fed stood by in utter silence while a rat union allied itself with the provincial Liberals, Aramark, Sodexo and the Compass Group. This was not just a raid – it was an act of sheer class betrayal, where the IWA teamed up with the Liberals as active accomplices in union-busting, and our leadership almost unanimously stood by, said nothing, and let them do it. And while we're at it, what about the IWA leadership's invitation to the government to legislate their own members back to work after a hard-fought strike against stiff concessions.

### STRUGGLES OF YOUTH

Meanwhile the labour movement gave scant support beyond lip service to the struggles of youth against the six-dollar "starting" wage, to anti-poverty activists fighting welfare cuts and housing shortages, or to women fighting the closure of women's centres across BC. Since May 2002, union leaders have maintained their staunch commitment to NOT mobilizing massive unitary protests of members and non-members against Campbell and the corporate agenda.

Simultaneous with these betrayals has been another disturbing development. Over the last ten years, some BC union leaders have increasingly become a network of junior capitalists. Using billions from their members' pension plans and retirement investments, they have created a corporate empire. They control the largest venture capital firm in western Canada (Working Opportunity Fund), the largest

developer of residential rental properties in BC (Concert Properties) and a network of companies involved in insurance, travel, investments and other activities. How many union members were shocked to learn recently of the \$16,000 donation Concert Properties gave to Gordon Campbell's Liberals?

"Unfair," they say, "the Concert executives did that behind our backs." Well, what the hell do you expect when you pick Liberal corporate honchos like Jack Poole and David Podmore to manage your members' money? And how do you explain the directors' decision to join Canada's biggest P3 lobby group (alongside Aramark, Compass and Sodexo)?

In summary, the present BC union leadership has exposed its own political bankruptcy and democratic deficiencies. Our movement may not be able to long survive a continuation of their short-sighted vision and demonstrably inadequate strategies. It's time for the rank-and-file to start making changes within organized labour so we can effectively fight back against greedy bosses, privatizing governments and corporate globalization.

If we don't, we will simply have to go through all this again. And again.

### MILITANT MOVEMENT

We need a militant movement. In the face of our attackers we will get nothing and defend nothing except through educated, intelligent, prepared, coordinated and courageous militancy. Globalization means everything is under attack, even the very existence of our communities. Refusing to fight back is surrender. Refusal to get ready for the inevitable battles is suicidal.

We need a democratic movement with a leadership and members committed to fostering debate within the labour movement, not stifling it. Membership decisions must be carried out, not ignored as with the action program adopted unanimously at the 2002 BC Fed Convention. And members must ALWAYS have the right to vote on contracts, regardless of leadership opinions OR strike-breaking legislation. Internal union democracy and membership control is one of the strongest weapons in our arsenal.

We need a movement that mobilizes solidarity. "An injury to one is an injury to all" is not just a slick slogan. It is what "union" means in concrete practice – our united

We need a democratic movement with a leadership and members committed to fostering debate within the labour movement, not stifling it.

strength against our enemies. No group of workers should stand alone and suffer defeats while the rest of us go along as usual.

We need a movement that builds alliances. Unions fighting alone to confront the attacks on our rights will lose. Community groups fighting alone will lose. We need to reject all the tired old habits of control and domination, and seek to build coalitions where labour and community organizations come together as partners and allies working together. We need to build open coalitions, and reject the past policies of exclusion, manipulation and control.

We need an independent union movement. We will need to be prepared to fight against cuts, to preserve social services and to resist return-to-work laws under a future NDP government too. Defeating Gordon Campbell will not mean our work is done, not by any means. This does not mean no involvement with progressive candidates or parties during elections. It does mean that electoralism is not labour's sole strategy and that electoral support is critical support, based on the actions of the elected.

### RIGHT TO STRIKE

We need a movement committed to reclaiming the unrestricted right to strike, by whatever means are necessary. At present, for all practical purposes BC's public sector workers have no legal right to strike. Ask HEU, the nurses, the teachers, the ferry workers. And now this de facto ban is starting to extend to private sector unions as well. Ask the IWA. The right to

strike was only won by labour's willingness to defy unjust laws. It will only be preserved by our willingness to use our right to strike, legally if possible, illegally if necessary, whether the government in power is Liberal or NDP.

Such a labour movement is not beyond our grasp. We can see it in the HEU members who organized to defend their own jobs and the right of all of us to public health care. We can see it in the ferry workers' courage in the face of government and the courts. We can see it in those principled IWA activists who have publicly condemned and organized against their own union's raid on HEU. We can see it in all those hospital workers and teachers and electricians and transit workers who stood up against Bill 37, and all those longshore workers and city employees and millworkers and ferry workers who were ready to walk out and join in.

And we've also seen the beginnings of such a movement in conventions and local meetings where members are starting to demand that trade unions fulfill their historical role of fighting for ourselves and for all working people.

Building such a movement will not be the work of a moment. It will take time, commitment, creativity, some tolerance/patience with each other and enduring courage. We can and will put the fighting spirit back into our movement, along with the necessary changes that go along with that – in strategy, in modes of internal/external functioning and in leadership. The alternative is too grim to accept. ★

July 22, 2004

# *A small window opens for the Left*

BY NATHAN RAO

**E**lections provide a snapshot of the broader political scene and relationship of forces. In the absence of a major domestic or international crisis, the framework of an election is set well before the campaign begins. A break with capitalism or neo-liberalism was on the margins of this year's federal election, and not just because of the narrow parameters within which the main parties defined their campaigns. There are only small pockets of support across the country for such a radical break. While present within a number of local NDP campaigns during the election, they have no common framework or credible independent profile inside or outside the NDP – with the noteworthy exception of the Union des forces progressistes (UFP) in Quebec. This is a product of two decades of uninterrupted neo-liberal attacks and restructuring – but also of the radical Left's weaknesses and failures.

Nonetheless, these elections were not “business as usual” as far as the broad Left (including the radical Left) was concerned. It was clear that this year's contest would be different from the federal elections of 1997 and 2000. The sudden drop in support for the Liberal government soon after Paul Martin was sworn in as Prime Minister suggested a level of political volatility not seen since the collapse of the heterogeneous alliance around the Mulroney Tories in the early 1990s.

Would a revitalized NDP under Jack Layton and resurgent Québec sovereignists galvanize the apparently sizeable section of the electorate seeking to punish the Liberals “from the left”? Would they

become a real factor in relation to a minority government, building further momentum in the process? After years of stagnation and decline, the broad Left looked to the June 28th elections with enthusiasm and anticipation.

In the end, after more than a decade in power during which they pushed the neo-liberal transformation of the country much further than the Mulroney Tories could ever have, the centre-Right Liberals did indeed suffer a partial reversal. They now

the object of a reported surge in voter intentions midway through the campaign.

The reversal of Liberal fortunes, the ongoing difficulties of the hard-Right, and the improved scores of the NDP and BQ have created a little breathing room for the broad Left. However, except perhaps in Québec, the Martin Liberals are nowhere near as vulnerable as the media storm around the sponsorship scandal led many commentators to conclude. There is a strong likelihood that this reversal will be

*The Liberals have considerable margin to manoeuvre, faced once again with a divided opposition whose different components will support this or that government initiative.*

lead the country's first minority government in a quarter century. This is cause for some satisfaction, and it is significant that a large segment of the hostility toward the Martin Liberals was expressed through the NDP and the Bloc Québécois (BQ), both of which improved their results substantially over the 2000 elections.

Another cause for celebration is the failure of the hard-Right – this time under the banner of the Conservative Party and Stephen Harper – to make a major breakthrough, in spite of having formally overcome vote-splitting at the polls and being

temporary, a product of the difficult transition within Liberal ranks from the Chrétien to the Martin team.

Many predicted that the transition from the Chrétien to the Martin team would not be a smooth one. Chrétien's success lay in his ability to push the neo-liberal transformation of the country, while incarnating a measure of continuity with the populist Liberal Party of the Trudeau years. This was the Third Way adapted to local conditions, in a league with the Clinton Democrats in the US, the Blair Labour Party in Britain and, more recently, the Schröder SPD in

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"I am not a crook — no, seriously I have no idea what happened to the sponsorship money..."



Germany.

However, this project of aggressive neoliberalism with a populist face was held together by the authoritarian and erratic figure of Chrétien himself, who could not remain head of government forever. Was his work now complete? Could he hand the reins of party and government over to the new generation of technocrats and spin doctors around Paul Martin? The answers were not at all clear, all the more so since the years of neo-liberalism had eroded what remained of the political and social base of the old welfare-state "Just Society" party of yesteryear.

Further, the Liberals drew strength from the weakness and division of their opposition and a relatively favorable economic and international climate. Some combination of economic difficulties, international pressures, Western regionalism, shifting corporate allegiances, Quebec nationalism and Left resurgence would undo Liberal fortunes sooner or later.

It has been rather later than sooner, and the Liberals have been able to hang on despite a slight drop in support in Ontario, the country's vote-rich service and manufacturing heartland, thanks to more or less stable scores overall in the rest of the country outside Québec. Even in Québec, they have hardly collapsed, in spite of the perfect storm that raged over their heads. The Liberals have considerable margin to manoeuvre, faced once again with a divided opposition whose different components will support this or that government initiative.

It is tempting for a Left in disarray to see Liberal resilience as an expression of the strength of left-wing, progressive opinion, a

last line of defense against hard-Right victory. Yet the same Ontario electorate that keeps the Liberals in power in Ottawa, brought in back-to-back hard-Right Harris governments provincially, followed by a more mainstream yet equally determined neo-liberal government under the McGuinty Liberals. It would probably be closer to the truth to say that the federal Liberals are the capitalist party best suited to the country's complicated conditions and Canadian capital's place and aspirations in the world. If Bay Street and the decisive southern Ontario middle-class electorate one day feel otherwise, they will turn to the Conservatives or some successor formation.

#### QUÉBEC, THE WEAK LINK?

News of the death of Québec's national aspirations has been greatly exaggerated. The BQ's strong showing signals the return of the "Québec national question" to the centre of Canadian political life, and echoes recent mass social protests against the Charest provincial government by the trade unions, social movements and other traditionally sovereigntist sectors.

It has been less than five years since the passage of the *Clarity Act*, "Plan B" in the Chrétien government's post-referendum strategy. It was designed and promoted as the nail in the coffin of "secessionist" feeling in Québec. As for "Plan A", the increased presence of the federal government in Québec, notably through the distribution of Canadian flags, the less said the better.

The result is certainly gratifying for the largely sovereigntist and independentist Left in Québec, and for those outside Québec who defended Quebec's national rights during the 1995 referendum and against the *Clarity Act* in 1999-2000. For us, it was not only an elementary question of solidarity and democratic rights, but also a vital strategic matter: no alliance against neoliberalism and its state is possible in this country without a strong commitment to establishing relations of equality and respect between the country's dominant English-speaking nation, the subordinate Québécois nation and the oppressed Aboriginal peoples.

This is the necessary starting point; whether this will take the form of separate states or a radical multinational overhaul of the federation will be settled through common work and discussion over the long term. There should be no underestimating the huge difficulties that lie ahead of us. Inside Quebec, despite the broadly Left-progressive profile of the BQ under former Maoist and union organizer Gilles Duceppe, and the massive street protests against the hard-Right Charest government, the sovereignty camp has yet to emerge from the neoliberal and conservative-nationalist (as opposed to progressive-sovereigntist) dead-end into which the Parizeau-Bouchard-Landry PQ governments led it until their defeat in 2003.



NDP leader Jack Layton

Outside Québec, there is a marked change in tone towards the sovereignists in some Left and left-liberal circles, exemplified by Jack Layton's initially strong re-statement of his opposition to the *Clarity Act*. But, after a decade of "one nation" nationalism in office, it will still be a long uphill battle against the accumulated forces of bad faith, political expedience and plain misunderstanding within much of English-Canadian opinion, including within the broad Left. Still, the election result and the ongoing protest movement in Québec give the Left new opportunities to do serious work around these difficult matters.

#### THE LEFT IN AN IMPASSE

This election settles very little for the Left. Not since the historic "Free Trade election" of 1988 have such a wide range of forces from the political and social-movement Left mobilized for an NDP campaign, including a number of young people involved in the anti-globalization and anti-war protests of recent years. While the results are an improvement over 2000, they are only marginally better than in 1997 (in the popular vote, though not in seats) and certainly not enough to signal a revival after 15 years of declining fortunes. This is surely a major disappointment.

To be sure, with the Marxist-Leninists scoring 0.07 percent of the popular vote and the Communist Party 0.03 percent, the independent radical Left is in no position to lecture anyone on electoral success. But there is clearly a strong case to be made against relying so heavily on election results and parliamentary horsetrading at a time

*It was clear even before the campaign began that the NDP was angling for some kind of special relationship with, or even inside, a Liberal minority government.*

when mass movements and a strategic project for real radical change are in such dire need of rethinking, rebuilding and renewal.

While Layton has hovered over traditional left-right tensions within the party, he has tended to be identified with the left. During the campaign, though, he gave in to sniping from within the party leadership and a corporate-media furor and backed down from his rejection of the *Clarity Act* and his stance in favour of a timid inheritance tax.

It was clear even before the campaign began that the NDP was angling for some kind of special relationship with, or even inside, a Liberal minority government. The thinking seemed to be that the Layton-led party could somehow replicate the success of David Miller's Toronto mayoral campaign on the federal level. Yet the party made very limited gains among the left-liberal urbanites that were key to the Miller victory. Target and "message" this "demographic" all you want, but don't be surprised when they run into the arms of the Liberals at the slightest hint of an invasion of barbaric reactionary hordes from the West. Indeed, most of the party's gains were not made among such people but in places with a longer tradition of trade-unionism and working-class politics: Hamilton, Windsor, Sault Sainte Marie, Skeena.

Even in relation to its own moderate electoralist approach, then, the federal NDP is clearly quite confounded within the new neo-liberal dispensation. It is an electoralist party unable to achieve significant electoral success, let alone victory. However, it may carve out a comfortable niche within neo-liberalism, as a parliamentary rump in Ottawa on the centre-Right Liberals' left flank, added to a handful of like-minded provincial and municipal governments.

Many NDP members and voters do not want this. Still, the new party-financing

law provides the financial basis, and acts as a disincentive for establishing a deeper and more dynamic relationship with renewed and strengthened trade unions and social movements. In such a context, though certainly just in most respects, the fight for proportional representation (PR) could become yet another conduit for distancing the party from its social roots and ensconcing it further within the machinery of Parliament and the state. In both instances – party-financing and PR – the obnoxious eco-capitalist transformation of the Greens should give pause for thought to those who see nothing but left-wing goodness flowing from these measures.

By rights, a wide-ranging debate should now open up in and around the NDP. But there continues to be a near absence of grass-roots activity and discussion in the party, in spite of the recent huge influx of new members. Moreover, due to the dissolution of the New Politics Initiative (NPI), the weakness and fragmentation of the independent radical Left, the decline in most of the protest movements of recent years, and the ongoing problems of the trade unions and social movements, such a debate is just as likely to herald a further shift in the direction of electoralism, parliamentary hijinks and reliance on media and the Internet.

It is important to stress that Left success is ultimately more likely to flow from combining short-term ongoing resistance to the corporate and military agenda with a medium-term strategic-organizational project aimed at breaking outright with neo-liberalism. Central to such a project is a revival of the youth-led protest movements of recent years, percolating back up through broader social-movement and class struggles of the kind we have recently seen in Québec, British Columbia and Newfoundland. As well, we will have to be in a position to challenge the NDP's monopoly over the party-electoral expression of such developments. ★

## BOOK REVIEW

# *Globalization, immigration and settlement*

BOOK: *CALCULATED KINDNESS: GLOBAL RESTRUCTURING, IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT IN CANADA*  
EDITED BY ROSE BAABA FOLSON  
PUBLISHED BY FERNWOOD PUBLISHING  
PRICE: \$19.95

REVIEWED BY SHEILA WILMOT

**C**alculated Kindness is a progressive collection of essays by various authors addressing the overlapping themes of globalization, immigration and settlement in Canada. Though there are various approaches and focuses within the collection, there are also a number of common themes. Since it is difficult to thoroughly review a nine-essay book, I will only address a few of the pieces as well as discuss some of the themes that run through the edition.

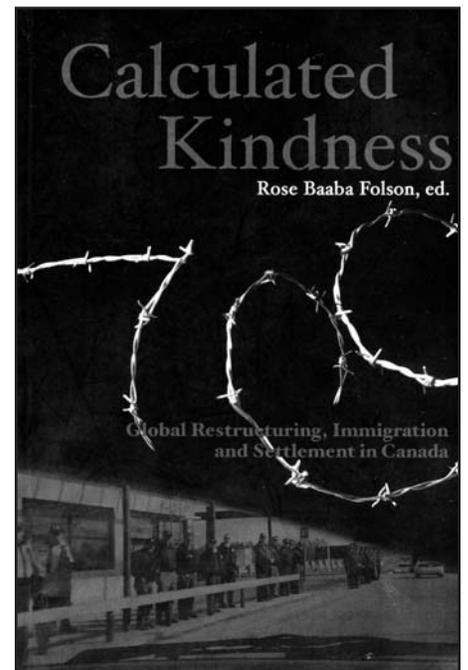
One of the most valuable things about this collection is how it grapples with the issue of migration from a systemic perspective while at the same time having a detailed, on-the-ground, agency-based description and analysis of the lives and experiences of immigrants and migrants. To do this in a consistently integrated way – both in terms of race, gender and class and also in terms of those two systemic and experiential levels of analysis – is quite a challenge, with any topic.

### CHALLENGING IDEOLOGIES OF MIGRATION

The first article “Representation of the Immigrant” by the book’s editor, Rose Baaba Folson, sets a detailed theoretical stage for the rest of the collection. She reviews the history and varied reasons for migration, for both the migrants and the

nation-states that benefit from their arrival. She also briefly sketches out the three common theories of migration of the last few decades. These are neo-classical economic equilibrium theory, the historical-structuralist approach and migration systems theory. Neo-classical economic equilibrium theory is considered a depoliticized, narrowly-economic, “push-pull” approach to understanding migration. The historical-structuralist approach is described as having its roots in (a conventional) Marxism. Migration systems theory is said to have been developed in the 1980s as a result of dissatisfaction with the other two theories and focuses on the colonial-based prior linkages between nation-states to more fully explain migration patterns.

Baaba Folson’s contribution also describes and challenges some of the common oppressive ideologies and realities about migration, such as the very connotations – both good and bad – that society has of the “migrant”. She points out how travel from South to North for work often leads to underemployment, for example doctors driving taxis, whereas migration from North to South is constructed as experts/consultants going to “fix problems”. Baaba Folson criticizes the image the Canadian State fosters of itself as a benevolent host country helping the unfortunate people from the third world make a better life, in a context where people and their future families can structurally become “permanent (im)migrants”.



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TO DO.

Sheila Wilmot is a frequent contributor to *New Socialist*.



The ship *Komagata Maru*, carrying 376 Sikh passengers, arrived off the coast of Vancouver in May of 1914 but was forbidden from landing in Canada and sat in the harbour for two months before being turned back without any provisions.

Magaly San Martin's piece "Unwanted in Paradise: Undocumented Migrant Women Sex Workers in Toronto" offers a well-integrated look at the often abusive experiences of such migrant workers. She communicates clearly the absurdity and injustice of how, while Canadian immigration regularly issues "exotic dancer" (sex trade worker) visas, the same State is not only unsympathetic to the women who are frequently and often brutally abused (physically, sexually and economically) once they arrive; it may treat them as criminals for doing the very work they were legally brought in to perform. Because sex-trade work is subjected to such a heavy moral judgement, so too are the women who are employed in it. Because they are not deemed productive or in any other way valued members of society, they are also constructed as not deserving social support.

The context for the blossoming of a wide range of precarious migrant work is also clearly defined in San Martin's article. With globalization, "global cities" such as Toronto are places where a growing group of well-paid professionals, a minority in the population as a whole, are a growing market for a wide range of specialty services that depend on low-waged, precarious jobs

for their expansion. Such services include fancy restaurants, cafes, and art shops, health-product stores and so on. Most of the low-paid work is therefore that of cashiers, dishwashers, salespeople and servers. Again, the themes of the benevolence of the Canadian State and the forms of racialized sexism migrant women face, are brought home in this piece.

In her contribution "Shifting the Paradigm: Globalization, Canadian Aid and the Migration Trail", Nupur Gogia provides a detailed analysis of the role of Northern non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in supporting and developing Canadian business interests abroad in the era of globalization. Intricately connected with this is the theme of how "migrants" are those that come from the South to the North, while it is "experts"

that go in the other direction to teach, help and build their careers. Gogia looks at the implicitly paternalistic assumptions of who has the right to leadership in not only "fixing problems", but defining who, what and where the problem is; and in whose interest these assumptions are generated and maintained.

The last piece by Alireza Asgharzadeh entitled "Islamic Fundamentalism, Globalization and Migration: New Challenges in Canada" is another useful contribution to the overall discussion. He not only looks in detail at the problematic of fundamentalist ideologies – using Iran as a detailed case in point – but he also looks at how the Arab or Muslim migrant is socially constructed in the West, becoming essentialized and socially marginalized. As such, both imperialism and religious fundamentalism perform a similar homogenizing function, mobilizing and misusing ideas about what is "culture" and "religion" in the name of power and social control.

As an example of this "homogenizing function", I would point to the manner in which both imperialist and religious fundamentalist ideologies often use culture and religion synonymously, such as when describing Iran as a Muslim "culture". Any

sense of individuality, any diversity in human perspective and experience is lost in this now fairly common notion. One would think that all Iranian women are Muslim just because they are swathed in chadors, that all Muslim-Iranian women themselves share the same religious and therefore same social values, and that none of these women have the right or even the will to exercise their agency beyond some narrow idea others have about what is their religion/culture. Such homogenizing also draws attention away from the sources of power and repression, from who enforced that veiling in the first place and the complexity of how that plays out for all women on a day-to-day basis.

Unfortunately, such homogenizing is not a sole activity of those in power on the right. The phenomenon of cultural relativism is still in fashion among certain segments of the broader left, a concept which boils down to: it's okay that "they" do that "over there"; it's their different "culture" and so it is not oppressive like it would be for "us" "over here". Asgharzadeh's article is quite effective in undermining relativist ideas and understandings.

## AN INTEGRATED ANALYSIS OF IMMIGRATION AND GLOBALIZATION

This collection grapples both at macro and daily-life levels with the issue of migration. Its ability to do this consistently and in an integrated way varies quite a bit within but particularly among the articles. Two broad topics could have used tighter theoretical attention: globalization and migration theory. Tightening the treatment of "globalization" would be quite a challenge, both because this term is now used in many different contexts to describe a wide range of social phenomena, and because this is a collection of authors who are not necessarily meant to be on the same theoretical page. Nonetheless, a more thorough foregrounding of globalization in the historical development of capitalist imperialism would be helpful early on in the book.

With respect to the discussion of migration theories, these theories are mentioned fairly briefly twice, in the first and seventh chapters, but we do not get a thorough analysis of the nature of these theories or their problematics. This collection clearly offers useful insights and analysis, particularly in the way it integrates gender, and

CLASS IS NOT AS A RIGID BOX THAT  
PEOPLE CAN BE PLACED OR FOUND IN:  
WE CAN SEE HOW IT IS COMPOSED  
AND RECOMPOSED OVER TIME AND IN  
DIFFERENT PLACES.

goes beyond at the same time as it takes from the neoclassical, historical-structuralist and the migration systems theories. However, it would have been interesting to have these traditions explored more fully.

The integrated analysis could be fuller at times too. That is, both in terms of weaving the complex social relations of race, gender and class, and also in terms of interconnecting systemic and experience-based analyses. For example, Bonnie Slade in her piece “Highly Skilled and Under-Theorized: Women Migrant Professionals” talks about how university educated immigrants become “de-skilled” once in Canada. To have a deeper look at de-skilling, it would have been helpful to explicitly discuss how such changes in class position occur. Many understand that the State gears its immigration policy to the various and changing needs of capital, for both production and reproduction, for work in the home and out of the home. We are at a point, as many of the authors addressed in different ways, where capital needs an increasing supply of “cheap labour” for the growing range of low-waged, service-oriented jobs. Yet, legislative changes have increased the difficulty of achieving independent-status immigration by increasing the educational and language requirements. At the same time, it remains extremely difficult for foreign-trained doctors, teachers and engineers to obtain professional accreditation in Canada. In the last number of years there have also been huge cuts to free English as a Second Language classes

In essence then, it would seem that State policies and the structure of the economy are functioning to knowingly seek out immigrants that will not be able to get jobs that they are legitimately educated and experienced to do, and who will also not be seeking under-funded language or university services. It is clear, then, that immi-

grants are forced to play the role of “cheap labour”, and that is what they were really allowed in to do. As such, because of the deeply internationalized structure of capitalism, and the racist and imperialist migration flows from South to North, more and more immigrants are experiencing a marked shift in class position when they arrive. So then, this is an analytical opportunity for seeing class not as a rigid box that people are placed or found in: we can see how it is composed and recomposed over time and in different places. It follows from such an analysis that the de-skilling that Slade talks about is therefore one of the results of such a process, rather than a description of the phenomenon itself.

One other issue that would be interesting to see explored in more depth is that of the “construction of the immigrant woman”. There seems to be a great tension, a dialectic really, between the fact that there is a material reality of poverty and exclusion lived by a huge percentage of migrant women of colour, and that there is generalizing, homogenizing, racialized sexist social construction of a “type” of woman who is unskilled and does low-waged work. We know that many people are actually living this kind of life, and so when we talk about it and organize around it, the oppressive reasons for it are crucial to understand. Yet, the ideas used in the construction are part and parcel of the lived experience, the material existence; the ideas do not stand outside nor are they stand-ins for lived experience. Therefore, it is a useful theoretical challenge to pull apart, within a historical framework, the lived experience from the externally imposed ideology, to understand more about the complex relationship between oppressive ideas about people and their/our actual experience of marginalization, and how these evolve over time.

All in all, *Calculated Kindness* is a very useful collection and well-worth reading.★

# WOMEN

EDUCATE • RESIST

The NSG is sending at least one of our women members to a week-long socialist feminist school at the International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE) in Amsterdam. This will be an opportunity to develop politics, share experiences and make international links.

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# IN MEMORY: BRETT CEMER (1967- 2004)

## *Dedicated socialist and union activist*

BY DAVID McNALLY

**U**pon learning he had brain cancer, Brett Cemer declared it his goal to reach forty years of age. Sadly, he didn't make it. Instead, this dedicated socialist, active trade unionist, enthusiastic hiker and camper, and genuinely sweet person died at age 37 on July 13th of this year.

Born and raised in small-town Alberta, Brett did a Masters degree in library sciences. While working on that degree, however, he developed a growing interest in socialist theory and politics, an interest that carried him to Toronto's York University. Starting his Masters there in Social and Political Thought in 1994, Brett gravitated to the group of York Marxists then affiliated with the International Socialists (IS). He quickly joined their ranks, bringing his sparkling intellect and wry sense of humour to the group.

As political difficulties in the IS mounted, largely having to do with grotesquely exaggerated political expectations and the hardening of the group's internal regime, Brett threw in his lot with the dissidents who ultimately left the organization and, in 1996, established the New Socialist Group. Brett played a crucial role in the early days of the new group. He was elected as one of the editors of *New Socialist* magazine and contributed a remarkably perceptive article on recent mass strikes in France to its first issue.

With his political commitments deepening, Brett decided that academic work was not his calling – but not before he

produced an incredibly astute Major Research Paper for his second Masters degree. Taking up Marxist analyses of the general strike in France in May 1968, particularly those written by Ernest Mandel and Tony Cliff, Brett argued that these works were flawed by the central assumption that the working class was more or less naturally drawn to revolution.

Brett challenged this premise, arguing that rather than treating reformism as an aberration to be explained, Marxists needed to grapple with the immense difficulties of developing revolutionary consciousness.

In 1996, Brett found work with the York University Faculty Association (YUFA), a union which would soon launch a long strike. Brett worked tirelessly, organizing bargaining research and internal communications. So significant was his contribution to YUFA's 1997 strike that he was soon hired into a permanent job, helping to shape the progressive direction the union took in the aftermath of its eight week strike. At the same time, Brett also became a central activist in his own union, CUPE 1281, holding various elected positions there. In all this work, Brett was amazingly free of any sense of self-importance. He simply and gracefully did what he thought needed to be done – and did it immensely well – on behalf of the labour and socialist movements.

By temperament and disposition, Brett was an exceptionally kind, modest, thoughtful person, astute in judgement, dry in humour. But he was no pushover.

One of my fondest memories of him



Brett Cemer atop an observation peak in BC, 2002

comes from the militant anti-poverty march organized by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) on June 15, 2000 at Toronto's Queen's Park. Tempers flared when the 1,500 protesters were greeted by baton wielding riot police, many of them on horseback. As the crowd resisted, Brett took up a position in the front ranks, bandana pulled up, rocks in hand, fighting back against the police offensive.

Brett brought the same fierce determination to his battle against cancer. Despite the ravages of the disease and the effects of treatments, he continued to jog regularly, and he seized all opportunities to go hiking and camping. Offering an example to all of us, Brett knew how precious time is, and he was intent on squeezing everything possible out of whatever he had left.

When he sensed that he was losing his battle against the disease wracking him, Brett returned to Alberta to be with loved ones and to hike through some of the terrain he most cherished. We lost him much too soon. But the friends, family members and progressive activists who knew him and worked with him all know that we are very much richer for what he gave to us. ★

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David McNally was a friend and comrade to Brett Cemer and is an editorial associate of *New Socialist*.

# TIME TO ORGANIZE

Branches and members of the New Socialist Group are active in a number of cities. Call for information about our activities.

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Prisoner Justice Day in Toronto, August 2004. See story on prison justice, p.16

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THE NEW SOCIALIST GROUP is an organization of activists working to renew socialism from below as part of today's struggles. Our socialism is revolutionary and democratic, committed to working-class self-emancipation, internationalism and opposition to all forms of oppression. We reject bureaucratic and authoritarian notions of socialism and look instead to the radical tradition of socialism from below, which believes that liberation can only be achieved through the activity and mobilization of the oppressed themselves. Ideas need to be put into action. So if you like what you read, get in touch with us.



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