

UNCLE SAM IN IRAN?

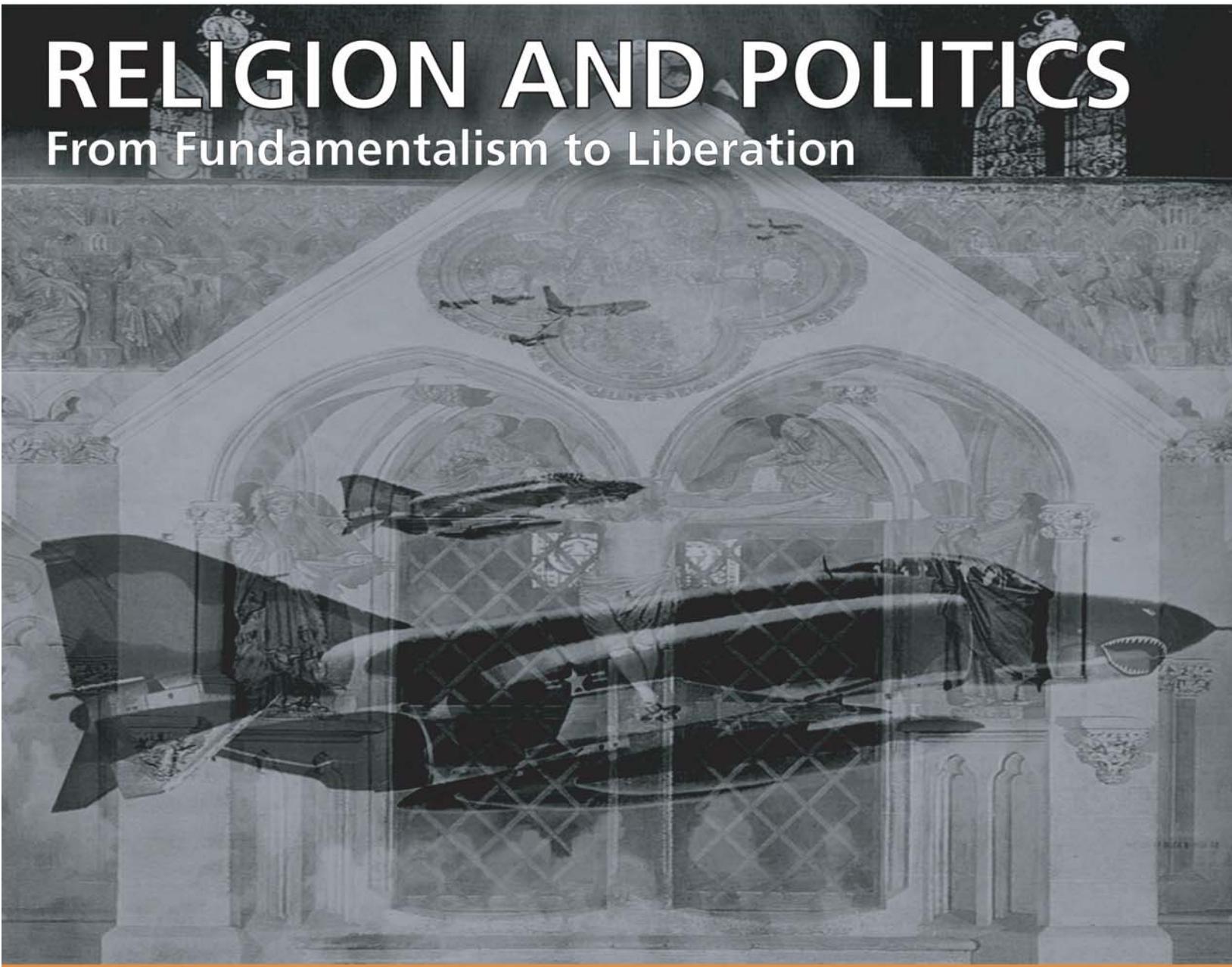
BOLIVIA, BOLIVIA!

# new★SOCIALIST

IDEAS FOR RADICAL CHANGE

## RELIGION AND POLITICS

From Fundamentalism to Liberation



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CHINA'S TRANSFORMATION  
GRASSY NARROWS

# EDITORIAL

## Their Democracy – and Ours

Since the Iraqi election of January 30, 2005, the Bush administration has bragged about its record as a force for democracy and freedom. Images of Iraqi voters, their fingers dipped in purple ink, have flashed on TV screens. Pundits have proclaimed that the war on Iraq was indeed really about liberation. A few commentators who have now abandoned the anti-war movement have been given ample air time.

But the notion that Bush and his ilk are serious democrats is nonsense. Nothing could be more disorienting for people who want to change the world than the idea that the US and other Western states are promoters of democracy.

In Iraq—a country under bloody US military occupation after a war condemned around the world—the US government did not want the direct elections that happened last January. Its original plan was to draw up a constitution, have indirect elections without mass participation and regulate political parties. Shiite Muslim leaders rejected this plan and organized major demonstrations against it, forcing US leaders to accept elections. Of course, Bush and the rest have tried to spin the elections they didn't want to their own advantage, but we shouldn't forget that these elections were never their Plan A and that resistance to the occupation grows.

Allowing the people of Iraq to determine their own future has never been a plan for the Bush administration. They intend to keep a large permanent military presence in Iraq in order to shape it as a neoliberal paradise whose natural resources (especially oil) and labour are ripe for exploitation by US multinational corporations, while using it as a platform to expand their political and economic interests in the region and globally.

In Venezuela, when a right-wing coup against nationalist President Hugo Chávez began in April 2002, the US government made its support for the coup clear. But popular mobilization defeated the plotters and restored Chávez to office, leaving the US administration embarrassed. Now that Chávez's speeches are growing more radical (and some in Venezuelan social movements are demanding a real “revolution in the revolution”), Bush would love to see Chávez go the way of Haiti's deposed president Aristide or Chile's Salvador Allende, killed in the US-backed 1973 coup. However, Chávez's referendum victory in 2004 makes it hard for the US to paint him as undemocratic.

The governments of the US, France and Canada supported

the February 2004 coup in Haiti that put a vicious gang of thugs in office, and have continued to back this regime despite its repressive attempts to smash political opposition and social movements.

Iraq, Venezuela and Haiti point to two lessons already learned at great human cost in the last century. One is that Western states that bray about democracy will readily act to get rid of democratically-elected governments that pursue policies contrary to their interests. The other is that the kind of liberal democracy supported by everyone from George Bush to Jack Layton is a very weak form of democracy indeed.

It is a terrible mistake to equate democracy with the parliamentary systems that exist today. While unquestionably preferable to outright dictatorships, these are versions of capitalist democracy that allow citizens to only vote every few years on who will preside over a society in which most important decisions (in the workplace, for example) are made without any pretense of democracy. Balanced-budget laws, international economic agreements, and constitutions like the one proposed for the European Union make not only capitalism but its neoliberal version mandatory for elected governments.

In fact, the concept of “freedom” advanced by liberals has typically meant free markets and the protection of capital—not freedom for people at large. The US (and other) ruling classes are no different today: one doesn't need to scratch too far beneath the surface of their rhetoric about “freedom” (in Iraq or elsewhere) to find their true economic interests. Indeed, the US National Security Strategy (2002) elevates free trade to a “moral principle,” and states that “free markets and free trade are key priorities” in the US's global pursuits.

Thankfully, this is not the only democracy imaginable. In 2000, a popular uprising rooted in democratic grassroots organizations defeated the privatization of water in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba. For a week, Cochabamba was in the hands of its working people. This was just the most recent upsurge in the history of the struggle for far-reaching democracy from below whose most famous high-points are the Paris Commune (1871), the Russian Revolution (1917) and the Spanish Revolution (1936). In this kind of democracy lies a flicker of hope that humanity might be able to avert the social and ecological disasters to which imperialist democrats like Bush and Paul Martin are steering us. ★

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#### ★ TIME TO ORGANIZE ★ .....

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We wish to correct the following errors that appeared in issue 50 (Feb, Mar, April): the name is Marc Lepine, not Lapin (p.6, 7, 37), Anishinaabe not Annihilable (p.9), and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, not People's Front for the Liberation of Palestina (p.27). We apologize for these errors.

# Isn't marriage queer?

## *A socialist take on same-sex unions*

BY FRANCES PIPER

*"Marriage! What a strange word to be applied to two men! Can't you hear the hell-hounds of society baying full pursuit behind us?"*

Letter from American artist F.O. Matthiessen to student and lover Russell Cheney, September 23, 1924.

I wonder what Matthiessen, a Christian and a socialist, would say today. In the 36 years after New York's Stonewall riots ushered in the movement for queer liberation, the battle lines for civil rights have been drawn and redrawn. While gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and transsexual people are far from living free of discrimination, they've nonetheless made substantial gains around such issues as censorship, freedom of association, pension entitlements, employment equity and AIDS treatment. And in the coming months, the Canadian government will vote on Bill C-38, which legalizes same-sex unions.

### BILL C-38

For many on the left, the bill marks a significant step forward, clearing the way for queers to be fully accepted into society. Others argue that demanding such acceptance is more accurately viewed as capitulating to the cultural norms and institutions of a patriarchal capitalist society, and a step backward from the sexual radicalism that once characterized the movement for queer liberation. We should be knocking down pillars of the current social order, critics argue, not rapping on the system's doors, asking to be let in. Such a critique is powerful, and has the merit of keeping the broader goals of the movement for radical change in plain sight. It doesn't engage, however, at the level on which the debate is actually occurring. As a result, though a crucial reminder of the need for radical transformation, on its own, this argument fails to provide practical political direction in the face of the very real possibility that the bigotry of the religious right will win the day.

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Frances Piper is an editorial associate of New Socialist.



The religious right is aligned in a way we've not seen in Canada since the abortion issue came to a head in the late 1980s. Led by Primate Ouellet, archbishop of Quebec and Canada's Catholic Church, who claims same-sex marriage "threatens to unleash nothing less than cultural upheaval whose negative consequences are still impossible to predict," the SOS Marriage coalition has flooded MP's constituency offices with emails and phone calls, and undertaken a massive postcard mail-out to

congregations. On the political front, they're backed by Stephen Harper and the Conservatives. They're also bolstered by their friends south of the border. Evangelical leader James Dobson—who made headlines recently for his homophobic attack on SpongeBob SquarePants, an absorbent cartoon character who holds hands with another male cartoon character—was quick off the mark. On the airways immediately after Prime Minister Paul Martin introduced Bill C-38, he

urged Canadians to follow the lead of the US. There, the 1996 *Defense of Marriage Act* defines marriage as a heterosexual institution and shields states from having to recognize same-sex marriages from other jurisdictions. And last fall, Dobson's coalition Focus on the Family orchestrated an eleven-state ban on same-sex marriage (six states banned civil unions too).

As a result, Bill C-38 may not pass. Opinion polls reveal even splits among politicians, or slender majorities in favour of the bill. Despite proclaiming that "you can't pick and choose the minority rights or the fundamental rights that you are going to defend," Martin can hardly be said to be rallying the troops. He's insisted only that his cabinet vote en bloc: other Liberals can "vote by conscience." That is, they'll do whatever is politically expedient in their riding. What should have been a slam-dunk—with the support of the governing Liberals and the NDP—has become a truly tenuous proposition.

The most forceful endorsements of same-sex marriage come from EGALE (the "respectable" face of the lesbian and gay movement), Canadians for Equal Marriage, the New Democratic Party and a handful of liberal religious groups. They argue, like Martin, that same-sex marriage is a human rights issue. In a letter to Martin, the General Council of the United Church of Canada, however, writes that alongside unequivocal support for same-sex civil marriage, it also "unequivocally supports the right of communities of faith to decline to perform such marriages"—a provision which is, in fact, embedded in the bill. Such a position is disingenuous. Human rights are, by definition, universal. In introducing qualifications—be it a vote-by-conscience or an exclusionary policy—these "defenders" of same-sex marriage signal their willingness to allow bigotry to exist in pockets.

#### QUEER LIBERATION

Still, is same-sex marriage worth fighting for? Marriage is the cornerstone of patriarchal capitalism, a powerful and pervasive means of regulating sexuality and gender relations. It legitimates only one form of union (up until now, monogamous and heterosexual) as the best suited for raising a family; in the name of marriage, women have been overworked, undervalued, berated, beaten and killed. It's also the primary mechanism through which the

responsibility, cost and labour involved in feeding, clothing and nurturing each other is placed in the hands of individuals. Meanwhile, capitalists benefit from having a workforce that is fed, rested and healthy. And let's not forget that weddings are a multi-billion dollar industry, many of which turn into grotesque carnivals of consumerism, with capitalists standing in the wings, preying on and reinforcing people's fantasies for eternal happiness. (South African diamond giant De Beers is a great example: just as Coke invented Santa Claus, De Beers invented the diamond engagement ring and the slogan

issue. Nonetheless, it's important to fight for queer access to private pensions if only to expand rather than limit the options and rights of individuals in the here and now. It's also critical to acknowledge that socialist-feminist and queer liberationist forces are too weak to influence the terms of public debate. We can only intervene, which in this case means intervening on a terrain shaped by a constitutional argument on the one hand and bigotry on the other. If the religious right prevails (or even makes significant inroads) today, it will be emboldened to pursue its agenda further, attacking abortions, daycare, teaching

*Weddings are a multi-billion dollar industry, many of which turn into grotesque carnivals of consumerism, with capitalists standing in the wings, preying on and reinforcing people's fantasies for eternal happiness.*

"A diamond is forever.") Allowing gays and lesbians to marry may push at the boundaries of those sexual norms, but not in a way that challenges the system itself. Rather, it encourages people to see marriage as the only stable and legitimate foundation of human relations. Moreover, as gay wedding trade shows, magazine features or the upcoming TV reality program *My Big Fat Gay Wedding* attest, it invites newlyweds to plow tons of money into what writer Anne Kingston calls the "wedding industrial complex," as they latch onto the myth that it's a gateway to eternal bliss. Indeed, left-wing critics of same-sex marriage are reacting in part to the retreat within queer communities from libertarian sexual politics and their growing social conservatism, through which the interests of professional, well-heeled gays and lesbians dominate.

So, how can such an institution possibly be part of the plan for queer liberation? Well, only in the limited, partial way that all bourgeois rights are. Think, for instance, of same-sex pension benefits. Integrally wound up with capitalist power relations and structures of legitimacy, they are simply an individualist solution to a social

evolution in schools and more. And that—taking the wind out of the sails of the right—is one of the most important reasons to support Bill C-38.

In the meantime, it is worth noting that gays and lesbians aren't exactly rushing to the alter. While same-sex marriage has been available for up to 85 per cent of Canada's population for two years (since the 2003 decision by an Ontario appeals court led to marriage liberalization in six provinces), only 4,500 ceremonies have been performed, and the rate of marriage has fallen in the last year. Clearly, the country's tens of thousands of same-sex couples don't view marriage as the apotheosis of freedom. Many may in fact share Matthiessen's perspective, who continues his letter to his lover: "We are beyond society... And so we have a marriage that was never seen on land or sea!... Oh it is strange enough. It has no ring, and no vows, no [wedding presents]... And so of course it has none of the coldness of passion, but merely the serene joy of companionship. It has no three hundred and sixty-five breakfasts opposite each other at the same table; and yet it desires frequent companionship, devotion, laughter. Its bonds indeed form the service that is perfect freedom." ★

# GRASSY NARROWS: HISTORY OF THE FIGHT

# *Mercury poisoning, clear-cutting and government collusion*

BY DAVE BROPHY

This is the second of three articles about Indigenous struggle in what is now known as Northwestern Ontario. The first article, in the Feb/March/April 2005 issue of NS, briefly examined the relationship between the Anishinaabe of the lake of the woods region and the Canadian state during the years leading up to and following the signing of Treaty 3 in 1873. The article described how the Canadian state violated the agreement and initiated a campaign to destroy the indigenous economy that had historically allowed the Anishinaabe to be a prosperous people.

This article will examine how the Canadian state continues to undermine the livelihoods of the Anishinaabe and the political factors that are shaping Grassy Narrows' present fight for their lands.

A reasonable starting point for sketching the historical background to the present struggle of Grassy Narrows is the hydro development on Anishinaabe lands in the 1950s. Ontario Hydro built two major dams at Ear Falls and Whitedog, causing significant and unpredictable fluctuations in water levels which affected wild rice beds, the habitat of fur-bearing animals and the local fishery.

In the 1960s Grassy Narrows was relocated by Indian Affairs so that it was more affordable to provide services to the community. Although the move wasn't far from the original site it had a considerable impact on the community. For the first time, there was a school on-site, which meant the kids were no longer taken by the government and sent to far-away residential schools. But the move also meant the community was now accessible by road, which caused considerable social upheaval.

In 1970 the community was faced with another major upheaval, when the government publicly acknowledged that the English-Wabigoon river system had been contaminated by several tons of inorganic

mercury, which was being dumped into the water upstream at the Dryden Pulp and Paper Company's mill. Recent media coverage of the impact of the mercury poisoning has drawn attention to the severe, on-going health problems of many members of both Grassy Narrows and White Dog First Nations, the two communities most adversely affected by the contaminated river system. But the impact of the mercury poisoning on the local economy has not received attention for a long time, even though the high rate of unemployment that currently plagues both Grassy Narrows and White Dog can be largely traced back to it.

As noted in the previous article, despite extensive development throughout the Treaty 3 area from the late 1800s onward, racist hiring practices limited employment opportunities for the Anishinaabe. Employment discrimination in white-controlled industries was compounded by the fact that the steady degradation of the land caused by outside development undermined traditional alternatives to waged work. Neverthe-

less, in the 1960s many members of the Grassy Narrows band were able to earn a decent livelihood as commercial fishers or as fishing and hunting guides for white-owned outfitters.

But this all changed dramatically as a result of the mercury contamination. The employment rate plummeted from about 90% to 10% when the government acknowledged the mercury poisoning and declared commercial fishing on the English-Wabigoon river illegal.

The government was horrendously slow to provide any compensation to Grassy Narrows and White Dog for the enormous economic and health effects caused by the mercury poisoning. Indeed, 15 years passed before Canada, Ontario and the corporate successor of the company that dumped the mercury coughed up about \$10 million for the people of Grassy Narrows and White Dog. This meagre offering, which amounted to about \$10,000 per person,



Anishinaabe activist blockading a logging truck at Grassy Narrows.

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Dave Brophy is a member of Friends of Grassy Narrows Winnipeg

was to make up for destroying the communities' source of water, a major part of their diet and their most important source of income.

Bearing in mind the Dryden Pulp and Paper Company's responsibility for the mercury contamination, we can see that clear cutting of the Whiskey Jack Forest by Abitibi-Consolidated, the most immediate reason for the current logging road blockade at Grassy Narrows, is only the latest instance of a forestry companies' destruction of Anishinaabe lands in the Treaty 3 area. This should be no surprise. After all, the stakes are high. Across Northwestern Ontario an estimated 15,000 jobs are related to the forestry industry, which also generates about \$600 million in tax revenue for governments.

#### GOVERNMENT COMPLICITY

The Canadian state is structured in such a way that it undermines Native peoples' self-determination. For treaty peoples, the nation-to-nation agreements that they signed with Canada provide a legal basis for asserting their Aboriginal rights. But when treaty rights concerning traditional land are violated, Natives' demands that these rights be upheld are dodged by the Canadian state through legal obfuscation.

The last article ended with a quote from a speech given in 1946 by Treaty 3 Grand Council spokesperson Tom Roy, addressing members of the federal parliament in Ottawa:

"We contend that the terms of our treaty were violated...by the federal government on or about April 16, 1894 when, without notifying the Indians, the federal government transferred the natural resources to the provinces, with whose laws we have [had] to comply since then. The Indians have tried to protest against this.... The answer has been: 'This comes entirely under the provincial governments, and there is no authority whatever vested in our department to change their laws'."

The Grand Chief's words apply just as well today. The blockade at Grassy Narrows went up in December, 2002 but a decade of protest against the clear cutting through official channels preceded it.

The community's concerns about clear cutting by Abitibi-Consolidated have been repeatedly ignored by the federal Ministry of Indian and Northern Affairs (INA) and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR). INA is officially responsible for



upholding the responsibilities of Canada as signatory to the treaties, while OMNR is designated official jurisdiction over land resources in the province of Ontario, and is thus responsible for issuing logging permits.

Before issuing these permits, OMNR is obliged to consult with First Nations, but decisions are often made without the support of the communities affected. This was the case with Grassy Narrows, whose participation in the consultation process with OMNR and Abitibi amounted to tokenism. Despite the community's staunch opposition to clear-cutting, OMNR consistently approved plans that allowed Abitibi to clear-cut on traditional lands.

#### GRASSROOTS STRUGGLE

When Aboriginal and treaty rights of First Nations like Grassy Narrows are not respected by the terms of logging permits issued by OMNR, they are told to consult INA. But when they appeal to INA, the federal ministry insists that Ontario's jurisdiction over land and resource allocation prevents them from taking action. The collusion of the two levels of government thus creates a situation in which corporations gain easy access to resources in First Nations' territory.

Native peoples' self-determination is further undermined by the Canadian state

from within. The *Indian Act* imposes the elective system of band government on First Nations, which deprives traditional leaders of recognition by insisting that the only spokespersons of the band are those elected according to the *Indian Act*.

In a community like Grassy Narrows, where there is mass unemployment because people's livelihoods have been taken away from them, the main sources of income are welfare checks and band council jobs, both of which depend on government funds. Obviously, such deep economic dependence on a state that has waged a centuries-long campaign of genocide and assimilation against you is devastating in terms of chronic poverty. But what is just as debilitating is the social stratification that this situation causes. The band council jobs are virtually the only locally accessible means of employment and adequate income, and therefore those who control the band council, the local political class, wield power disproportionately in the community.

Not surprisingly, then, strong resistance from First Nations to exploitation and oppression has not often come from the official leadership. This was true in the 1970s, when there was a major upsurge of militant grassroots action among native peoples throughout North America. The

See GRASSY NARROWS: Page 11

# BOLIVIA: OCTOBER OR JANUARY AGENDA?

# Regional division, class struggle and indigenous rebellion

BY JEFFERY R. WEBBER

The “Agenda de Octubre” (October Agenda)—a list of popular demands to remake Bolivia in the name of the poor and the indigenous majority—emerged from the inspiring rebellion of the indigenous and popular classes of the altiplano (high plateau), the shantytown of El Alto and the neighbourhoods on the hill-sides of the capital city, La Paz, in the “Gas War” of October 2003.

January 2005 witnessed the ongoing struggle for the October Agenda in the “Water War” of El Alto, led by the Federation of Neighbours of El Alto (FEJUVE), and the coca growers’ (cocaleros) 10-day road blockade in the Yungas region that was brought to an abrupt end by tear gas and rubber bullets.

However, we’ve also seen the first impressive counter-mobilization of the Right in the massive, bourgeois-led demonstrations for “autonomy” in the city of Santa Cruz. As the social movements in the western departments (provinces) of the country persist in their commitment to the October Agenda, the departments of Beni, Tarija, and, most importantly, Santa Cruz have fortified the Right’s “Agenda de Enero” (January Agenda).

The regime of President Carlos Diego Mesa Gisbert—put in power by the forces of October after the ousting of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (Goni)—provided enough rhetorical support for the October Agenda to pacify temporarily the radicalized sectors of the altiplano and El Alto. But in practice it continued subservience to IMF dictates, the US “war on drugs” and the neoliberal model first set in place in 1985.

Meanwhile, the strongest leftist political



ALL PHOTOS: JEFFERY WEBBER

Bolivian social movements are mobilizing to reclaim Bolivia’s natural resources and win real power for the Indigenous majority.

party, the MAS, led by Evo Morales, has generally opted for passive support of the Mesa administration. The historic window of opportunity forced open by the October rebellion is slowly closing as Mesa follows a middle of the road path and Morales, who dreams of winning the presidential election in 2007, moderates the MAS’s demands and moves away from direct action in the streets.

January’s almost three-week-long hunger strikes, occupations of public buildings, airport blockade and massive marches in Santa Cruz—some say more than 300,000 took to the streets—demonstrate the frightening capacity of the “Cruceño” [the people of Santa Cruz are Cruceños—*NS*] elite to mobilize students, unions and the popular sectors behind a bourgeois agenda, concealed beneath the banner of regional “autonomy.” In this case, the region’s people are asked to unite against the “centralism” of the capital city, La Paz.

## ORIGINS OF OCTOBER AGENDA

To understand the current conjuncture we need to look back. From the 1952 National Revolution until the neoliberal counter-reform of 1985, the tin miners,

working through the Trotskyist- and syndicalist-influenced Bolivian Workers Central (COB), represented the vanguard of the Bolivian Left. In 1985, the newly neoliberal National Revolutionary Movement party (MNR) unleashed orthodox shock therapy. The neoliberal model continues to this day.

The principal targets in 1985 were the state-owned mines, more for political reasons than economic ones. The brutal process of privatization was facilitated by the unlucky coincidence of a crash in the price of tin on the world market. More than 25 000 of the 32 000 miners were laid off. Many miners migrated to the cities (especially El Alto), or to the Chapare region, near the city of Cochabamba, where they became coca growers. They took their Marxist traditions with them. US foreign policy and its “War on Drugs” helped spur to life an anti-imperialist, campesino-indígena [small farmer-indigenous—*NS*] movement in the Chapare region. The cocaleros emerged as the new vanguard of the left, mixing as they did the traditions of the miners and the Indigenous traditions of the longer-standing coca growers. The MAS emerged out of the cocaleros as a Leftist/Indigenous force in the national panorama of political parties.

But it was not until 2000 that popular

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forces took the offensive against neoliberalism. The February-April 2000 Water War in Cochabamba successfully booted out a multinational consortium and reversed the privatization of water. This revitalized Bolivian social movements, bringing a sense of hope back into the struggle after the dark years of retreat.

This new cycle of contention reached its zenith in the dramatic mobilizations of the Gas War of October 2003. It was a revolt against neoliberalism and the social consequences of economic restructuring. It sought national sovereignty in the face of pressure to adapt to a vicious new world order. It aimed to reclaim Bolivia's natural resources. It strengthened the class struggle. It demanded real power for the Indigenous majority.

The most important, all-encompassing component of the October Agenda is the call for a Constituent Assembly. This represents a potential threat to the large landowners, the petroleum multinationals and the business elite that run the show in Santa Cruz and used to run the whole country.

#### THE REBELLION OF SANTA CRUZ

To understand recent events in Santa Cruz, one needs to appreciate what's at stake for the Cruceño elite. The funnelling of state largesse to the region of Santa Cruz, in an effort to dynamize its oil, gas and agroindustrial export economies, began soon after 1952. It reached exaggerated proportions under the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer (1971-78).

Since 1985, the traditional political parties (MNR, ADN and MIR) have acted



**The Bolivian social movement organization FEJUVE, whose offices are pictured above, is working towards the expulsion of the water company Aguas del Illimani, owned by French multinational Suez. FEJUVE was heavily involved in recent strikes.**

as veritable channels of power for the Cruceño bourgeoisie. Cruceño elites occupied key ministerial positions that defined the political economy of the last 20 years, as well as the highest levels of the three key neoliberal parties.

State support for the Cruceño elite has had a considerable impact on Santa Cruz's role in the Bolivian economy. As is common with corporate welfare bums, the Cruceño bourgeoisie has constructed an elaborate ideological edifice that inverts their actual historical relationship with the state and the rest of Bolivia: "we generate almost half of the national taxes, and carry on our backs the major part of the economy."

Over the last five years, however, the dominance of Cruceño capital has slowly been put in jeopardy. There was a decline in the ideology of free market capitalism at the outset of the 2000s. There was the considerable collapse in the performance of the traditional neoliberal parties in the 2002 presidential elections. These parties fell still further from grace in the municipal elections of last year. Finally, and most importantly, the October Agenda challenged the fundamental ethos of the Cruceño elite and its material basis. The January Agenda is the answer to this threat.

#### MESA'S NEOLIBERAL REFORMISM

President Mesa, vice president under the Goni regime, was brought to power on the crest of the October Rebellion after distancing himself from the violent repression ordered by Goni. He then surrounded himself with "gonistas" and other neoliberal ministers.

Unlike Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Mesa has never denounced neoliberal orthodoxy when attending international forums. His administration has agreed with the IMF to continue with the neoliberal model, to respect previous privatizations and to persist in paying the crushing external debt.

Indeed, it was an IMF dictate that sparked the mobilizations that would become the January Agenda. In early December 2004, a Bolivian government



**Bolivia has entered a time of uncertainty, a time of regional division in the class struggle and clearly delineated, conflicting national projects.**



The Bolivian state, in support of its bourgeoisie and conservative middle-class, seeks to repress mass mobilizations for democracy against capital.

team travelled to Washington to finalize the details of a loan, which was to come into effect on January 1, 2005 and to continue until the end of March 2005. A medium-term plan was reached that called for measures to improve the precarious fiscal situation of the Bolivian state.

On December 29, the newspaper *La Razón* reported that the IMF was explicitly opposed to existing subsidies for diesel and gasoline. The next day Mesa ordered an increase in the price of both. This sparked mobilizations all over the country, including the business-led demonstrations in Santa Cruz, which morphed from a fight to maintain subsidies on diesel and gas to the Cruceño elite's January Agenda.

#### THE CURRENT IMPASSE

In one sense the gigantic mobilization in Santa Cruz demonstrates the first significant counter-reaction to the October Agenda. But the fact that the Cruceño elite have regionalized their struggle and have, in a sense, temporarily forsaken the "national" struggle to control the Bolivian state, is also a sign of their weakness. It indicates that the October Agenda has effectively crushed the bourgeois ideology of the free market, foreign investment and racism outside of Santa Cruz (and Beni and Tarija). The Right is stronger than they were after October 2003, thanks to Mesa's

neoliberal reformism, although their power is restricted primarily to Santa Cruz.

Even in Santa Cruz itself the elite faces challenges. On January 27, university students and indigenous groups marched against the January Agenda, mobilizing over 1000 people. Workers, some business people, campesinos and others marched on the same day in Sucre against the Cruceño rebellion. San Julián, on the road connecting the departments of Santa Cruz and Trinidad, was blockaded by peasant colonizers. Apparently the influence of the Landless Movement (MST) in this blockade was impressive.

The next day, university students, the Civic Committee, market vendors, the Federation of Neighbours of La Paz, and others marched in the capital against the January Agenda. Morales's MAS party appears, haltingly, to be taking to street politics once again. Morales announced plans for a march, concentrated in the city of Cochabamba, of campesinos, cocaleros, and others in defence of "dignity and demanding the approval of a new Hydrocarbons Law." The march would also be in defence of the democratic process and against the Cruceño revolt, which he said threatened liberty and constitutional government in Bolivia. Marches took place over these weeks in other cities as well. Finally, the mayors of all major cities apart

from Santa Cruz came out against the January Agenda.

Bolivia has entered a time of uncertainty, a time of regional division in the class struggle and clearly delineated, conflicting national projects. The hope for the October Agenda lies in the radicalization of the social movements of the western part of the country which would pressure Mesa to grant reforms while emboldening the courageous dissidents within the Santa Cruz department

#### POSTSCRIPT—SUNDAY, MARCH 27, 2005

Much has happened since I wrote this article in early February, but the basic polarization between Left and Right national projects has not changed.

Undoubtedly, the event with the most political and social consequence in the last two months was Mesa's faked resignation. On the evening of March 6, Mesa announced that he would present his (revocable) resignation before Congress the next morning.

Late that Sunday night and into the early hours of Monday morning I went to the Plaza Murillo, which hosts the Presidential Palace, to witness thousands of spontaneously organized middle-class right-wingers from La Paz work themselves into frenzied chants of "Death to Evo!" (Morales), "Evo and Abel are the Apocalypse!" (Abel Mamani is a key leader of the Federation of United Neighbours of El Alto), and "mano dura" ("iron fist"). They asked Mesa to stay in government and repress the social movements that had effectively shut down most of the country through blockades and strikes in the preceding week.

In retrospect, it seems clear that Mesa never intended to resign. He announced his resignation for Congress to consider, expecting that they would rally behind him. The un-elected President—Mesa holds office as a result of the October 2003 popular insurrection—was looking for a new mandate from the political Right. In his manipulative speech of Sunday evening he named the enemies of the state—Evo Morales and Abel Mamani—and announced the necessity of proceeding with policies around natural resources that would be "viable" in the face of the "international community" (in other words, the imperialist and sub-imperialist states, the international financial institutions,

transnational corporations and the local bourgeoisie with extensive ties to international capital).

To do this the country needed to rally around Mesa, to clear the roads of blockades and protect the “human right” of free transit and commerce, and to denounce the Aymara-indigenous social movement and Leftist political party leaders Mamani and Morales. As Mesa hoped, the middle class came out in force, drawing on a long tradition of racial hatred and fear of the lower classes. In Congress Mesa abandoned his tacit 17-month old pact with Morales and MAS and built a new Right-wing coalition with the traditional parties MNR, MIR and NFR. This part went as Mesa planned.

What he didn't predict was a radicalized unity of Left forces. On March 9, an “anti-oligarchic” pact was signed in the historic La Paz headquarters of the COB by Morales, Jaime Solares (leader of the COB), Felipe Quispe and Román Loayza (leaders of the campesino union, the CSUTCB), Roberto de la Cruz (councillor

of El Alto, who played a central role in the October rebellion), Alejo Véliz (leader of the Trópico de Cochabamba, an association of coca-growers), leaders of the MST, Oscar Olivera (a leader in Cochabamba's “Water War”), and Omar Fernandez (from the irrigating farmers' association in Cochabamba) and others. Journalist Luis Gómez has commented that these folks don't normally pass time comfortably together, never mind sign pacts of solidarity. So, at the time, the potential seemed great.

The unifying theme was the demand that the new hydrocarbons law, then in front of Congress, would increase royalties paid by transnationals to the Bolivian state on hydrocarbons (mainly natural gas) to 50%. Blockades went up in force in support of this demand, especially those led by the cocaleros, who are closely aligned with MAS.

Then followed a complicated and bizarre set of events. As the blockades persisted and a “light” hydrocarbons law passed

through the lower house and moved to the Senate, on March 15 Mesa announced on television that he wanted presidential elections, scheduled for 2007, moved forward to August of this year because it was impossible to govern. This was rejected as unconstitutional by Congress, and Mesa continues as President (although now with significantly less support from within the middle class). The blockades were lifted, however, as Morales helped to de-radicalize the cocaleros, many of whom wanted to continue with blockades until the demand for 50% royalties on gas was won.

The proposed hydrocarbons law is before the Senate, and the outcome remains unclear. There are no roadblocks, and the capital is eerily quiet given the tradition of many residents of La Paz to leave the city for religious vacations during Holy Week. The “tense calm” that everyone here refers to is likely to break in the near future, as the extraordinary underlying tensions and social divisions within this country persist. ★

## Grassy Narrows

*Continued from Page 7*

nearby town of Kenora was in fact a focal point of this upsurge in 1974. With the upheaval and repercussions of the mercury poisoning still reverberating acutely through Grassy Narrows and White Dog, protest led to the armed occupation of Anishinaabe Park, which lasted over two weeks in the summer of 1974.

Some of the activists involved in the Anishinaabe Park occupation went on to organise the Native People's Caravan that crossed the country from BC to Ottawa in September of the same year, ending with a march of almost a thousand native people on Parliament Hill. While the natives' anger was directed most forcefully at Jean Chrétien's Ministry of Indian Affairs, there was also much frustration expressed at the grassroots with band councils' failure to take action that properly reflected the radical demands being made by members of their communities.

This is not to say that the official leadership of First Nations in Canada are inherently corrupt. But it is important to note the structural factors that cause band coun-

cils to sometimes follow a policy of conservatism that does not properly represent the majority of band member. Overt self-interest may be the cause of this, but most often band councils are simply faced with a great challenge. Given their dependency on Indian Affairs for funds to provide basic services to their impoverished communities, they have to make difficult decisions on if and how to make demands of the state.

At Grassy Narrows, the current blockade was initiated by three young people, who were quickly supported by a core group of other activists in the community. It was a year before any meaningful response came from Abitibi-Consolidated or the governments. Predictably, it was the Grassy Narrows Band Council, rather than the blockaders, who were approached, even though the former had nothing to do with initiating the blockade and had largely remained aloof from it during the first year.

The relationship between Grassy Narrows community activists who have spearheaded the blockade and the local Band Council has been perhaps similar to the situation at Sun Peaks, where community activists have had to negotiate a delicate relationship with the official leadership of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council. The

blockaders at Grassy Narrows were supported by their Band Council only reluctantly at first, and more recently have been excluded from talks with Abitibi and the provincial and federal levels of government, while the official leadership has gladly taken the opportunity to negotiate, with leverage, on behalf of the community with high-level representatives of the company and governments.

But Grassy Narrows' fight for their homeland is far from over. Talks have so far yielded nothing but a rejection of scant offerings from Abitibi, with INA and OMNR participating solely as passive observers, in keeping with their typical strategy of non-intervention vis-a-vis upholding aboriginal rights. Meanwhile, Abitibi is talking about making further job cuts at the Kenora mill, and politicians are calling for corporate welfare to prop up the forestry industry in Northwestern Ontario. ★

*The final article in this three-part series, appearing in the July/August 2005 issue of New Socialist, will look at the struggles of Grassy Narrows activists to address these and other recent developments and discuss strategies for activists trying to work as allies to native, anti-colonial movements in Canada.*

# THINKING ABOUT CHINA

# Capitalism, socialism and class struggle

BY PAUL BURKETT AND MARTIN HART-LANDSBERG

**C**hina's economic transformation has stunned the world. The country has become one of the world's main exporters of manufactured goods and sites for transnational corporate investment, while purportedly lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty. As a result, analysts across a wide band of the political spectrum have embraced China's market reform strategy, promoting it as a model for other countries. Disagreements over policy do exist, but they are largely about the appropriate sequencing and pacing of the reform process. Conservatives advocate a faster dismantling of barriers to the free operation of internal and external market forces; progressives argue for caution in order to avoid a repetition of the "shock therapy" disaster in the USSR. Significantly, despite their differences over the desired pace of reform, many on both right and left now share the view, based largely on the Chinese experience, that market reforms and insertion into the global capitalist economy can, when properly managed, offer tremendous opportunities for achieving growth, development and poverty reduction.

Politically, the most crucial features of this consensus on China are its top-down vision of socio-economic change and idealized view of markets and the reform process. Both left and right agree that China's development successes reflect the wisdom of her government leaders. This helps explain the repeated paeans to the "smartness" of the Chinese leadership. Both groups recognize that China's rapid growth has generated economic and social problems: macroeconomic instability, rising inequality, breakdowns in the health care and educational systems (especially in rural areas), worsening environmental pollution and so on. But they tend to view these malfunctions and maladies largely as symptoms of institutional lags in the marketization process, not as organic outgrowths of marketization itself.

Naturally, conservatives prefer that China modernize in the US mold and build cooperative relations with the US, while progressives more often champion China's regional and global emergence as a welcome counterweight to US-style neolib-

eral and militarized capitalism. However, both groups see China's continued modernization and democratization as natural outcomes of the country's market-driven economic development. This shared perspective explains why both right and left

admirers of China generally treat the increasing anti-market-reform struggles of Chinese working people as disruptive and threatening to China's future. Implicit in this perspective is the belief that there is no positive potential for popular struggles to inform our basic conceptions of development and policy.

Another important element underlying the consensus on China is the shared acceptance of the nation as the primary unit of analysis. In other words, individual country successes (such as China's) are not seen as organically connected to the failures of other countries (e.g., the 1997-98 East Asian crisis). Rather than combining these national experiences into a vision of capitalism as an organic, global, unevenly developing system, the consensus approach tends to lead to a focus on unwise policies as an explanation of individual country failures. Presumably if all governments adopted China-like policies then all nations would develop. One consequence of this approach is that the capitalist system



1998 meeting where Chinese drivers voted overwhelmingly to organize an independent labour union. The government-owned firm then refused to recognize it, calling it illegal.

Paul Burkett and Martin Hart-Landsberg are authors of *China and Socialism: Market Reforms and Class Struggle*.

escapes critical scrutiny.

From a Marxist perspective, these troubling methodological features of the right-left consensus on China have a common basis: the failure to take account of the class-exploitative and alienated roots of the market and of market-driven development, and the corollary failure to choose the side of working people in the class struggle and consider development policy from their standpoint. Correcting this failure leads to a very different picture of China's experience, one that illuminates the ongoing restoration of capitalism and resultant skyrocketing of social and ecological costs.

The consensus emphasis on elite choices is justified in one respect: it was the Communist Party leadership's decision to move the country in a pro-market direction. At the time Deng Xiao Ping succeeded Mao Zedong there was growing worker unrest over the inefficiencies and imbalances in China's system of production and investment. But there was no mass movement seeking to solve these problems through market forces and private enterprise. Rather, many peasants, workers and intellectuals, and their spokespersons in the Party, were calling for socialist renewal through more grassroots cooperative-democratic decision-making in economic, political and cultural arenas. Deng and his faction of the Party were threatened by, and saw partial marketization as a safe alternative to, this response. This was not stated openly, of course. Rather, market reforms were presented as a more stable and effective approach to socialist renewal than any grassroots-oriented strategy of "putting politics in command."

#### CHINA AND THE FREE MARKET

However, while it may have been a Party-elite decision to begin marketization, market imperatives quickly became uncontrollable. Each stage in the reform process generated new tensions and contradictions that could only be resolved (given the elite's bias against worker-community centered alternatives) through a further expansion of market power. The "slippery slope" of market reforms thus led to ever more reliance on the market at the expense of planning, and the privileging of private enterprises over state enterprises and, increasingly, of foreign enterprises and markets over domestic ones. The general direction of the reform process is captured by the following trends: the state enterprise

share of industrial output fell from 64 percent in 1995 to 30 percent in 2002, while the foreign enterprise share rose to 34 percent; the manufacturing workforce fell by fifteen million over the same period; the real, as opposed to official, urban unemployment rate is now in double digits; real manufacturing wages declined over the last decade; the urban-rural income gap, once one of the lowest, is now one of the highest in the world; the share of exports produced by foreign enterprises rose from 17 percent in 1990 to 51 percent in 2001; and the country's dependence on exports has grown to the point that export growth accounted for 74 percent of China's overall economic growth in 2002.

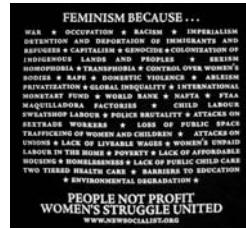
The specifics of the reform dialectic cannot be fully developed here (see our book *China and Socialism* for an overview),

but we can highlight some of its main elements. First, increased reliance on market and profit incentives meant a greater emphasis on monetary profit and loss statements in the evaluation of enterprise efficiency. Since state enterprises were saddled with relatively high tax rates as well as employment, investment and employee-welfare responsibilities (pensions, housing, health care), they appeared increasingly inefficient compared to private enterprises. Second, the imposition of employment "rationalization" policies in state enterprises (contract labour, for example) to promote greater market efficiency encouraged the shedding of workers and increased the importance of private enterprise for job growth. Third, the falling profitability of

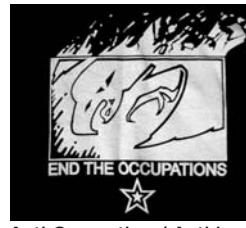
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state enterprises led to a growing volume of unpayable state enterprise debts, which encouraged privatization of state enterprises as a way for the government to unload these debts and increase revenues. Fourth, privatization encouraged greater reliance on foreign investors, who were often the only ones with sufficient financial resources to purchase the targeted state enterprises. Fifth, the growing resistance of state workers and managers to market and profit driven behaviour encouraged greater state support for foreign organized production as a means to overcome this resistance.



At present there is a population (some estimate around 200-300 million) of mostly unemployed rural workers who are wandering throughout China looking for work.

Sixth, the growing inequality and overproduction generated by marketization meant that exports had to take a leading role if rapid growth was to continue, and this new emphasis on exports naturally meant still greater reliance on foreign enterprises, especially in high-tech industries. Seventh, the increasing centrality of exports and foreign investment meant that China's growth increasingly depended on accession to global trade and investment agreements, above all the WTO, which further intensified market liberalization, privatization and export pressures.

#### CHINA'S NEW REALITY

In sum, without denying the importance of naked class interest, the key dynamic driving China's transformation was the path-dependent channeling of policy options into pro-market, pro-capitalist directions. The results were increasing alienation of economic priorities from grassroots needs and capabilities, and a corrosion of the state's ability to plan and direct economic activity, both of which only reinforced the growing dependence on markets, private enterprise, foreign capital

and exports. Given these inexorable dynamics, it is disingenuous for progressive admirers of the Chinese model to confidently proclaim that enlightened Party leaders will implement social welfare and regulatory policies capable of ameliorating the human and environmental costs of market- and profit-driven behaviors. The reality is that the reform process has progressively eroded the motivation and ability of an increasingly bourgeois Party elite to formulate and implement such countervailing policies. Moreover, the rising unemployment, economic insecurity,

also mask the deteriorating situation of working women who have borne a higher share of state-enterprise lay-offs and longer spells of unemployment compared to men, as well as worsening job- and wage-discrimination, under market reforms. Women have also suffered more than men from the destruction of the social safety net, which has increased their domestic workload (e.g., care-giving for children and the elderly), thereby undermining their competitive position in labour markets—accentuating their growing dependence on male incomes. The expanded and uncompensated domestic duties of women—a result of the reversal of progress toward socialist production relations—are completely unaccounted for in the official estimates of poverty reduction.

On a practical political level, it is obvious that left agreement with the consensus on China can only have a disastrous impact on international worker solidarity. Those who admire the "smart" reform policies undertaken by China's Party-elite are implicitly endorsing the efforts by that same elite to suppress and fragment the slowly rising tide of worker resistance to China's capitalist restoration. Far from a wise or "realistic" modernization, that elite and its international supporters are on the backward-looking side of history—the side declaring that "there is no alternative" to the market and private profit as the main organizing principles of economic and cultural life. Insofar as such elitist thinking is posed as a new "socialist realism" it can only sow confusion and suspicion among Chinese worker-community activists about the motivations of international socialists and even the meaning of socialism itself.

China's economic transformation has not only come at high cost for Chinese working people it has also intensified (as well as benefited from) the contradictions of capitalist development in other countries, especially in East Asia. Far from simply a positive sum experience replicable by other nations, China's increasingly export-led growth is intensifying competitive pressures and crisis tendencies throughout the region. For example, China's emergence as the leading export platform for transnational capital greatly accentuated the overproduction that was at the heart of the 1997-98 East Asian crisis. China's growing export prowess is now driving an even more profound restructuring of East Asian economic activity.

The official poverty-reduction figures

Chinese export successes in advanced capitalist markets, in particular that of the US, are forcing other East Asian producers out of those markets. They have responded by reorienting their export activity to the production of inputs for use by export-oriented transnational corporations operating in China. Thus, all of East Asia is being knitted together into a regional accumulation regime that depends on continued China-based export success. The much slower post-crisis growth of the erstwhile East Asian "miracle" countries compared to the pre-crisis period, and the heightened competitiveness pressures that are squeezing living standards throughout the region, suggest that this rearrangement of regional economic relations is incapable of promoting a stable process of long term development. Meanwhile, China's export explosion was also enabled by, and has accentuated, the industrial hollowing out of the Japanese and US economies as well as the unsustainable US trade deficit: the two main sources of imbalances and potential breakdowns in the contemporary global capitalist economy.

In short, while the search for national development models based on national competitive criteria suggests that different countries can achieve China-like successes based on their simultaneous adoption of China-like economic policies, in reality this is a fallacy of composition. China's growth has been both cause and effect of the growing problems of FDI- [foreign direct investment -NS] and export-led growth in other peripheral nations along with the contradictions of capitalist maturation in the US and other developed countries. China's export competitiveness should not blind us to the fact that its rapid industrialization has been part and parcel of the uneven development and overproduction of capital on a world scale. To ignore this wider dynamic is to take the global capitalist framework as a predetermined, natural constraint on development visions and policies.

Fortunately, working people in China and the rest of East Asia continue to oppose attempts by their respective states to force down their living conditions in order to achieve greater national competitiveness. For example, despite intensive government repression and ideological manipulation, Chinese workers are resisting cuts in wages, pensions and health benefits, while Chinese peasants are fight-

Despite intensive government repression and ideological manipulation, Chinese workers are resisting cuts in wages, pensions and health benefits

ing against exploitative taxes and land grabs by private- and government-sector capitalists. Throughout East Asia, popular movements have prevented capitalists, their governments and the IMF from shifting all the costs of the 1997-98 crisis onto working people and their communities. Indonesian and South Korean grassroots and labor movements continue to press for democratic change and its extension from political and cultural to socio-economic spheres.

If these struggles coalesce, their ability to envision and fight for human need-based forms of regional development will be greatly strengthened. In this connection, China's capitalist transformation has served to tie Chinese and other East Asian workers into common transnational investment, production, trade and financial networks, thereby subjecting them to a common set of competitive pressures. In this way, capitalist uneven development is creating a common ground for nationally based struggles to merge into a regional movement from below pressing for more worker-community centered economic relations.

Socialists inside and outside East Asia can assist this broadening and deepening of worker-community struggle by demystifying all apologetic ideologies of capitalist development, including neoliberalism and so-called market-socialism. This means uncovering the class exploitation and alienation that lie at the core of marketization and privatization policies, and debunking the myth that there are no alternatives to the market. In fact, collective/public provision of health care, education, housing, transport, water, power, land use and many other basic services has already proved more cost-effective (in terms of the rate of need satisfaction per unit cost) than their private- and market-based administration in a broad range of circumstances. This explains the deep popular opposition to privatization and marketization policies in an equally broad array of national settings. The challenge is to bring this public sector

under closer worker-community control, and then extend this control to other activities. This extension can and should be informed by studies of past efforts at workers' production control and self-management—a history that has been suppressed or distorted by capitalist media and mainstream social science.

Socialists also need to critically engage with existing popular struggles for improved work and living conditions, even when they do not explicitly demand worker-community control over production and investment. The limits, and hidden revolutionary potentials, of these movements need to be studied and interpolated in a process linking reform struggles to structural economic transformations that gear production, exchange and distribution to socially agreed upon use values rather than the exploitative and destructive requirements of competitive monetary accumulation. In short, far from undermining the relevance of Marxism, the Chinese experience highlights its critical importance as a framework for understanding and overcoming the dynamics of contemporary capitalism. ★

## 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.

But all this costs money. We need to raise over \$2000 to cover air fare, tuition and expenses. So we are asking you, our readers, to help out with financial donations. No contribution is too small!

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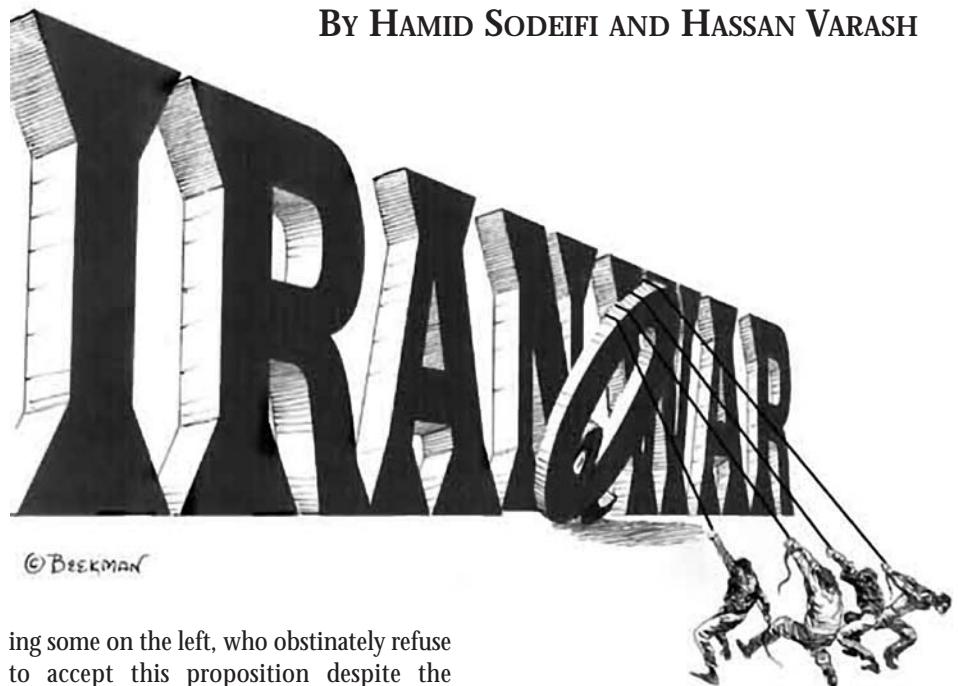
# US's next strategic target?

The terror masters in Washington seem to be getting ready to move on to their next target: Iran. According to Seymour Hersh in a recent article in *The New Yorker*, intelligence and military officials have confirmed that Iran is the US's "next strategic target." In the same article Hersh goes on to say that the "administration has been conducting secret reconnaissance missions inside Iran at least since last summer." In a speech in February, Scott Ritter, the ex-marine turned United Nations Special Commission weapons inspector, alleged that "President Bush has received and signed off on orders for an aerial attack on Iran planned for June".

The Bush administration, for its part, has made it clear that so far as Iran is concerned, it will keep all options open, including military attack. In recent months, the US government has ratcheted up its smear campaign against Iran in an unimaginative repeat—down to charges of assisting international terrorists and pursuit of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)—of the lead up to the Iraq war. Could they really be serious? After all, as Bush himself put it recently, "Iran is not Iraq" and the Americans are already having serious difficulties in Iraq.

#### MIDDLE EAST AND PAX AMERICANA

As hard as it may seem at first sight, given the idiocy of their mascot George Bush, the Neo-cons in charge of the current US administration have always had a very coherent plan for the Middle East. The steps taken so far—invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq—were not taken arbitrarily, nor were they responses to external imperatives like support for terrorism by these countries or threats posed by them to the US. They were deliberate moves designed to ensure the hegemony of the American empire into the 21st century. There are many people in the West, includ-



ing some on the left, who obstinately refuse to accept this proposition despite the written declarations to its effect by those in charge of the US government at the highest levels .

The invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the situation in Lebanon, Syria and Iran today can only be properly understood in this broader context. Central to this strategy is securing control of the richest deposits of carbon fuel in the globe—the most important source of primary energy—both to satisfy the US's own energy requirements and, more importantly, to control the flow of oil and natural gas to its allies and adversaries. Two-thirds of the known reserves of oil in the world are in the Middle East, with potentially another ten percent in the Caspian region. Middle Eastern countries also sit atop an enormous reserve of natural gas, increasingly an important source of primary energy.

As Robert Ebel of the Center for Strategic and International Studies put it to a State Department audience: "oil fuels military power, national treasuries, and international politics." Petroleum, he

continued, "is a determinant of well being, of national security, and international power for those who possess this vital resource, and the converse for those who do not".

From the vantage point of the Neo-cons in charge of the White House and the Pentagon, there is an historic opportunity to cement the faith of the 21st century in favour of the US if it can take advantage of its absolute military superiority to wrest control of the vast energy resources of the Middle East and Central Asia (as well as other parts of the world, of course). This has been the guiding principle of White House foreign policy for the last four years and will remain so for the next four.

To seize this rich source of power and profit, the Neo-cons in Washington have undertaken to control the region *directly*, by establishing a large permanent military force *in its heart*. This, of course, is at once the continuation and escalation of over 25 years of US policy in the region—ever since the Carter Doctrine, shortly after the fall of the Shah of Iran, established that the US considers access to the Gulf oil of "vital interest" to its national security. As former US President Carter put it, the US will use

Hamid Sodeifi is an editorial associate of New Socialist. Hassan Varash is author of Nationalism and Islam in Contemporary Iraq.

"any means necessary, including military force", to keep the Gulf oil flowing. The US Central Command (Centcom) was formed specifically to guarantee this flow of oil. Centcom Commanders have been very clear about their mandate over the years. Consider, for instance, the testimony of Centcom commander-in-chief General Binford Peay III to the US House subcommittee in 1997:

"With over 65 percent of the world's oil reserves located in the Gulf states of the region—from which the United States imports nearly 20 percent of its needs; Western Europe, 43 percent; and Japan 68 percent—the international community must have free and unfettered access to the region's resources." [Any disruptions in the flow of oil] "would intensify the volatility of the world oil market [and] precipitate economic calamity for the developed and developing world alike."

The Carter Doctrine, however, could not be fully implemented so long as the Soviet Union could keep the US plans in check. Shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, Bush senior and Centcom commander-in-chief Norman Schwarzkopf executed the first Gulf War against Iraq. Despite the insistence of the Neo-cons at that time to the contrary, however, the US government decided against direct occupation of Iraq after the first Gulf War. The second Gulf War, so far as the Neo-cons are concerned, merely completed what should have been done a decade earlier. This is why they were

*Only one country has demonstrated the barbarity to use nuclear weapons against a civilian population; not once but twice. That country is the United States.*

so eager to invade Iraq from the beginning and were not going to be deterred either by facts that disputed their claims about supposed terrorist connections and the existence of WMDs, or by international law. The stakes were simply too high and the US too powerful to worry about any kind of opposition.

But the Neo-cons plans do not end with Iraq. They always saw the invasion of Iraq as part of a broader strategy to reshape the entire Middle East in line with long-term



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Anti-American mural artwork in Iran.

US (and Israeli) interests. Their success in Iraq has only whetted their appetite for the most important piece in the puzzle: Iran.

#### SUCCESS IN IRAQ?

Before turning to Iran, it may be necessary to clarify the matter of "success" in Iraq. Surely, with the increasing death toll, lack of access to basic services and generally miserable conditions for most Iraqis, lack of security and jobs, the continuing occupation and the sham elections, we cannot refer to Iraq as a "success". But the Neo-cons were never interested in the well-being of Iraqis or a truly democratic outcome. To believe otherwise is to fall into the trap of

in Iraq and take control of Iraqi oil; and they've done just that. And to top it all, they have won themselves another four years in office.

There were, of course, mistakes made along the way, both political and military, and lessons to be learned. There remain, as well, significant challenges for them in Iraq, such as securing the Iraqi pipelines. The Neo-cons do not deny this. Indeed, they will use the lessons of the Iraqi occupation when it comes to Iran.

With its massive energy resources and critical geo-strategic position, an obedient Iran is vital to the success of the Neo-cons' plans. Conversely, they see a strong, potentially nuclear, Iran, with the ability to control the Strait of Hormoz and the Persian Gulf and act as a regional power as a most undesirable outcome for both the US and Israel. The fact is that the Neo-cons, under the direction of Douglas Feith, have been exploring potential military options against Iran for some time. The recent hype about Iran's nuclear energy is merely the smokescreen to justify a potential attack. Let's remember, when there is concern about nuclear arms in the hands of "uncivilized" nations, with its typically racist overtones, that only one country has demonstrated the barbarity to use nuclear weapons against a civilian population; not once but twice. That country is the United States. More recently, the Neo-cons have been toying with the idea of developing "tactical nuclear weapons" to be used in their "theaters of war". The Neo-cons' anxiety is not so much about proliferation of nuclear weapons as it is with the mainte-

White House propaganda. The Neo-cons were successful because despite the dire warnings before the invasion of Iraq about an Arab uprising throughout the region, potentially leading to the fall of pro-US regimes, no such thing happened. They were successful because the fears of irreparable damage to the US's relations with its allies, especially the Europeans, proved to have been greatly exaggerated. They were successful because they had set out to establish a permanent military force



rence of overwhelming military balance of power which certain weapons technologies (such as nukes) affords them.

They are thus deadly serious about keeping Iran out of the nuclear weapons game and will do whatever they see fit to make sure that it does not obtain them. One possible scenario under consideration by the Neo-cons is to attack a selected number of targets in Iran, including military and nuclear energy sites. Aside from the obvious military benefits, the Neo-cons hope that such an attack will initiate a popular uprising against the much-disliked theocratic government of Iran. The problem, however, as the Neo-cons see it, is the potential for asymmetrical response by Iran through its network of supporters in the region (including in Iraq) against US and Israeli interests. Lebanon is of particular concern given the influence of Iran there through groups like Hezbollah. Hence, the recent developments in Lebanon may be closely linked to possible plans for attacks against Iran (and Syria). By creating an international incident (murder of Hariri), purportedly committed by the Syrian regime, the Israeli and US governments hope to force the removal of Syria from Lebanon, making it easier for Israeli backed forces to take control and subdue militant Islamists and pro-Palestinian forces. This will not only achieve a long-standing policy objective of the Israeli state vis-à-vis Lebanon but also reduce the possibility of pro-Iranian forces using Lebanon as a staging ground for

attacks against Israeli positions.

An attack on Iran may thus have to be postponed until Lebanon and Syria are dealt with. Indeed, Syria may have moved higher up in the Neo-cons' plan of attack as a result. But the success of US/Israeli plans in Lebanon and Syria itself depends to a large extent on subduing Iran and, no less importantly, on getting the approval of Russia. Russia, for its part, has made it clear that it will not agree to a US or Israeli attack against Syria, symbolized by its refusal to halt the delivery of mobile anti-aircraft missiles to Syria, as demanded by Israel.

More troubling, so far as the Neo-cons are concerned, is that none of their war games against Iran have produced satisfactory results despite their ability to attack it from the east, west and south now that they have control of Afghanistan, Iraq and the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the idea that an attack against Iranian targets, including nuclear energy facilities, would result in an uprising against the Iranian government is the subject of ridicule by more serious analysts in the US and globally.

In the US, a powerful and influential wing of the American ruling class, with a multi-lateralist outlook, has been arguing in favour of "a new approach" toward Iran by recognizing that the US "unilateralist sanctions has not succeeded in its stated objective." Instead, they argue, by denying Washington greater leverage vis-à-vis the Iranian government, this policy has harmed US "interests in a critical region of

the world". They also categorically reject the underlying assumptions of the Neo-cons and believe that an attack against Iran would have serious negative repercussions for the US. Instead, they propose to engage "selectively with Iran to promote regional stability, dissuade Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons, preserve reliable energy supplies, [and] reduce the threat of terror." This section of the American ruling class is in constant struggle against the Neo-cons over a whole host of issues in its quest for hegemony in the US.

The European states, while not necessarily opposed, at least at the moment, to let the US play the role of global cop on behalf of international capital, are nonetheless suspicious of the Bush administration's unilateralism and military adventures in the region. They depend on the Middle East for much of their oil requirements and have, as well, a great deal of other trade and economic interests in the region. Their insistence on pursuing diplomatic options is motivated primarily by these considerations.

To make the situation even more complex, the Chinese and the Indian governments have recently signed major oil and natural gas deals with Iran, frustrating Washington's plan for control of energy supplies and submission of Iran through sanctions. The Neo-cons are thus stuck in a difficult place. Their vision of global domination necessitates control of energy flows from the Persian Gulf and the Caspian regions. This, in turn, requires that Iran be brought into their orbit of direct influence. Yet, the options for achieving this are, at the moment, limited. They lack any real organization in Iran and their simulated war games have produced disastrous results. To top it all, they face strong opposition in the US itself and internationally. This is why they seem to have backed off from their belligerent stance by accepting the European's proposed course of action to contain Iran's nuclear technology through a series of so-called incentives, such as admission to the World Trade Organization.

In the short run, therefore, a US attack against Iran seems unlikely. That said, we should remain vigilant, as the Neo-cons are a vicious bunch of ideologues whose actions are not necessarily guided by rational analysis. They may yet take a gamble on Iran which, regardless of the outcome, will cost tens of thousands of lives. ★

## FEATURE: MARXISM AND RELIGION

# *Opiate of the people?*

*The Marxist view of religion has been greatly over-simplified, typically identified with the well-worn refrain that it's the "opiate of the people." In this article, MICHAEL LÖWY challenges this misconception, and presents us with a richly nuanced view of Marxism and religion.*

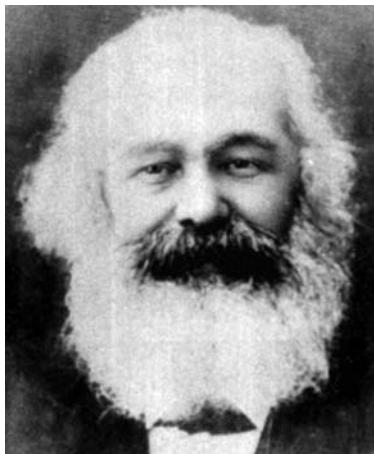
Is religion still, as Marx and Engels saw it in the nineteenth century, a bulwark of reaction, obscurantism and conservatism? To a large extent, the answer is yes. Their view still applies to many Catholic institutions, to the fundamentalist currents of the main confessions (Christian, Jewish or Muslim), to most evangelical groups (and their expression in the so-called "Electronic Church") and to the majority of the new religious sects—some of which, such as the notorious Moon Church, are nothing but a skilful combination of financial manipulations, obscurantist brainwashing and fanatical anti-communism.

However, the emergence of revolutionary Christianity and Liberation Theology in Latin America (and elsewhere) opens a new historical chapter and raises exciting new questions which cannot be answered without a renewal of the Marxist analysis of religion, the subject of this article.

THE WELL-KNOWN PHRASE "RELIGION IS THE opiate of the people" is considered as the quintessence of the Marxist conception of the religious phenomenon by most of its supporters *and* its opponents. How far is this an accurate viewpoint? First of all, one should emphasize that this statement is *not at all specifically Marxist*. The same phrase can be found, in various contexts, in the writings of German philosophers Kant, Herder, Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, Moses Hess and Heinrich Heine. For instance, in his essay on Ludwig Börne (1840), Heine already uses it—in a rather positive (although ironical) way: "Welcome be a religion that pours into the bitter chalice of the suffering human species some sweet, soporific drops of spiritual opium, some drops of love, hope and faith". Moses Hess, in his essays published in Switzerland in 1843, takes a more critical (but still ambiguous) stand: "Religion can make bearable...the unhappy consciousness of serfdom...in the same way as opium is of good help in painful diseases."

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Marx's phrase, "Religion is the opiate of the people," is often cited. Less often quoted is his starting point: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed... the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions."

The expression appeared shortly afterwards in Marx's article on the German philosopher Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1844). An attentive reading of the paragraph where this phrase appears, reveals that it is more qualified and less one-sided than usually believed. Although obviously critical of religion, Marx takes into account the *dual character* of the phenomenon: "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of an unspiritual situation. It is the opiate of the people."

If one reads the whole essay, it appears clearly that Marx's viewpoint owes more to left neo-Hegelianism, which saw religion as the alienation of the human essence, than to Enlightenment philosophy, which simply denounced it as a clerical conspiracy. In fact when Marx wrote the above passage he was still a disciple of Feuerbach, and a neo-

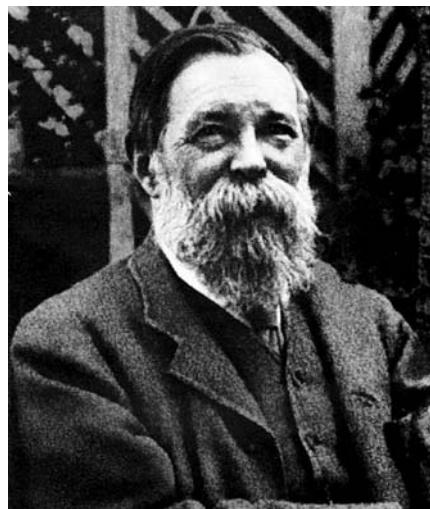
Hegelian. His analysis of religion was therefore "pre-Marxist," without any class reference, and rather ahistorical. But it had a *dialectical quality*, grasping the contradictory character of the religious "distress": both a legitimization of existing conditions and a protest against it.

It was only later, particularly in *The German Ideology* (1846), that the proper Marxist study of religion as a *social and historical reality* began. The key element of this new method for the analysis of religion is to approach it as one of the many forms of *ideology*—i.e. of the *spiritual production* of a people, of the production of ideas, representations and consciousness, necessarily conditioned by material production and the corresponding social relations. Although he uses from time to time the concept of "reflection"—which will lead several generations of Marxists into a sterile side-track—the key idea of the book is the need to explain the genesis and development of the various forms of consciousness (religion, ethics, philosophy, etc) by the social relations, "by which means, of course, the whole thing can be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another)."

After writing, with Engels, *The German Ideology*, Marx paid very little attention to religion as such, i.e. as a specific cultural/ideological universe of meaning. One can find, however, in the first volume of *Capital*, some interesting methodological remarks; for instance, the well-known footnote where he answers to the argument according to which the importance of politics in the Ancient times, and of religion in the Middle-Age reveal the inadequacy of the materialist interpretation of history: “Neither could the Middle-Age live from Catholicism, nor Antiquity from politics. The respective economic conditions explain, in fact, why Catholicism there and politics here played the dominant role.” Marx will never bother to provide the economic reasons for the importance of medieval religion, but this passage is quite important, because it acknowledges that, under certain historical circumstances, religion can indeed *play a decisive role in the life of a society*.

IN SPITE OF HIS GENERAL LACK OF INTEREST FOR RELIGION, Marx paid attention to the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism. Several passages in *Capital* make reference to the contribution of Protestantism to the early emergence of capitalism—for instance by stimulating the expropriation of Church property and communal pastures. In the *Grundrisse* he makes—half a century before German sociologist Max Weber’s famous essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism!*—the following illuminating comment on the intimate association between Protestantism and capitalism: “The cult of money has its asceticism, its self-denial, its self-sacrifice—economy and frugality, contempt for mundane, temporal and fleeting pleasures; the chase after the *eternal* treasure. Hence the connection between English Puritanism or Dutch Protestantism and money-making.” The parallel (but not identity!) with Weber’s thesis is astonishing—the more so since Weber could not have read this passage (the *Grundrisse* was published for the first time in 1940).

On the other hand, Marx often referred to capitalism as a “religion of daily life” based on the fetishism of commodities. He described capital as “a Moloch that requires the whole world as a due sacrifice,” and capitalist progress as a “monstrous pagan god, that only wanted to drink nectar in the skulls of the dead.” His critique of political economy is peppered with frequent references to idolatry: Baal, Moloch,



**Engels recognized a dual character of religion: its role in legitimating established order, but also its critical, protesting and even revolutionary role.**

Mammon, the Golden Calf and, of course, the concept of “fetish” itself. But this language has rather a metaphorical than a substantial meaning in terms of the sociology of religion.

ENGELS DISPLAYED A MUCH GREATER interest than Marx for religious phenomena and their historic role. Engels’s main contribution to the Marxist study of religions is his analysis of the relationship of religious representations to *class struggle*. Over and beyond the philosophical polemic of “materialism against idealism,” he was interested in understanding and explaining concrete social and historical forms of religion. Christianity no longer appeared (like in Feuerbach) as a timeless “essence,” but as a cultural system undergoing transformations in different

historical periods: first as a religion of the slaves, later as the state ideology of the Roman Empire, then tailored to feudal hierarchy and finally adapted to bourgeois society. It thus appears as a symbolic space fought over by antagonistic social forces—for instance, in the sixteenth century, feudal theology, bourgeois Protestantism and plebeian heresies.

Occasionally his analysis slips towards a narrowly utilitarian, instrumental interpretation of religious movements: “each of the different classes uses its own appropriate religion... and it makes little difference whether these gentlemen believe in their respective religions or not.”

## *Under certain historical circumstances, religion can play a decisive role in the life of a society.*

Engels seems to find nothing but the “religious disguise” of class interests in the different forms of belief. However, thanks to his class-struggle method, he realized—unlike the Enlightenment philosophers—that the clergy was not a socially homogeneous body: in certain historical conjunctures, it divided itself according to its class composition. Thus during the Reformation, we have on the one side the high clergy, the feudal summit of the hierarchy, and on the other, the lower clergy, which supplied the ideologues of the Reformation and of the revolutionary peasant movement.

While being a materialist, an atheist and an irreconcilable enemy of religion, Engels nevertheless grasped, like the young Marx, the dual character of the phenomenon: its role in legitimating established order, but also, according to social circumstances, its critical, protesting and even revolutionary role. Furthermore, most of the concrete studies he wrote concerned the *rebellious* forms of religion.

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oppressed and ruling  
classes.*

FIRST OF ALL, HE WAS INTERESTED IN *primitive Christianity*, which he defined as the religion of the poor, the banished, the damned, the persecuted and oppressed. The first Christians came from the lowest levels of society: slaves, free people who had been deprived of their rights and small peasants who were crippled by debts. He even went so far as to draw an astonishing parallel between this primitive Christianity and modern socialism: a) the two great movements are not the creation of leaders and prophets—although prophets are never in short supply in either of them—but are mass movements; b) both are movements of the oppressed, suffering persecution, their members are proscribed and hunted down by the ruling authorities; c) both preach an imminent liberation from slavery and misery. To embellish his comparison Engels, somewhat provocatively, quoted a saying of the French historian Renan: “If you want to get an idea of what the first Christian communities were like, take a look at a local branch of the International Workingmen’s Association” (the multi-national network of working-class organizations formed in 1864, also known as the First International).

According to Engels, the parallel between socialism and early Christianity is present in all movements that dream, throughout the centuries, to restore the primitive Christian religion—from the Taborites of John Zizka and the anabaptists of Thomas Münzer to (after 1830) the French revolutionary communists and the partisans of the German utopian communist Wilhelm Weitling.

There remains, however, in the eyes of Engels, an essential difference between the two movements: the primitive Christians transposed deliverance to the hereafter whereas socialism places it in this world.

But is this difference as clear-cut as it appears at first sight? In his study of the great peasant wars in Germany it seems to become blurred: Thomas Münzer, the theologian and leader of the revolutionary peasants and heretic (anabaptist) plebeians of the 16th

century, wanted the immediate establishment *on earth* of the Kingdom of God, the millenarian Kingdom of the prophets. According to Engels, the Kingdom of God for Münzer was a society without class differences, private property and state authority independent of, or foreign to, the members of that society. However, Engels was still tempted to reduce religion to a stratagem: he spoke of Münzer’s Christian “phraseology” and his biblical “cloak.” The specifically religious dimension of Münzerian millenarianism, its spiritual and moral force, its authentically experienced mystical depth, seem to have eluded him.

Engels does not hide his admiration for the German Chiliastic prophet, whose ideas he describes as “quasi-communist” and “religious revolutionary”: they were less a synthesis of the plebeian demands from those times than “a brilliant anticipation” of future proletarian emancipatory aims. This *anticipatory and utopian* dimension of religion—not to be explained in terms of the “reflection theory”—is not further explored by Engels but is intensely and richly worked out (as we shall see later) by Ernst Bloch.

The last revolutionary movement that was waged under the banner of religion was, according to Engels, the English Puritan movement of the 17th century. If religion, and not materialism, furnished the ideology of this revolution, it is because of the

politically reactionary nature of this philosophy in England, represented by Hobbes and other partisans of royal absolutism. In contrast to this conservative materialism and deism, the Protestant sects gave to the war against the Stuart royalty its religious banner and its fighters.

This analysis is quite interesting: breaking with the linear vision of history inherited from the Enlightenment, Engels acknowledges that the struggle between materialism and religion does not necessarily correspond to the war between revolution and counter-revolution, progress and regression, liberty and



A Stalinist anti-religious propaganda poster produced in the Soviet Union by Cherepuhin in 1930. The text reads: “The road to colonial oppression by capitalism and imperialism is paved by priests and missionaries assisted by the poisonous narcotic of religion.” Labels on gas canisters: “Poison gas narcotic of religion.”

*Instead of waging a philosophical battle in the name of materialism, Rosa Luxemburg tried to rescue the social dimension of the Christian tradition for the labour movement.*

despotism, oppressed and ruling classes. In this precise case, the relation is exactly the opposite one: revolutionary religion against absolutist materialism.

Engels was convinced that since the French Revolution, religion could no more function as a revolutionary ideology, and he was surprised when French and German communists such as Cabet or Weitling would claim that "Christianity is Communism." He could not predict liberation theology, but, thanks to his analysis of religious phenomena from the viewpoint

of class struggle, he brought out the protest potential of religion and opened the way for a new approach—distinct both from Enlightenment philosophy (religion as a clerical conspiracy) and from German neo-Hegelianism (religion as alienated human essence)—to the relationship between religion and society.

MANY MARXISTS IN THE EUROPEAN LABOUR MOVEMENT WERE radically hostile to religion but believed that the atheistic battle against religious ideology must be subordinated to the concrete necessities of the class struggle, which demands unity between workers who believe in God and those who do not. Lenin himself, who very often denounced religion as a "mystical fog," insisted in his article "Socialism and Religion" (1905) that atheism should not be part of the party's programme because "unity in the really revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class for creation of a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven."

Rosa Luxemburg shared this strategy, but she developed a different and original approach. Although a staunch atheist herself, she attacked in her writings less religion as such than the reactionary policy of the Church in the name of its own tradition. In an essay written in 1905 ("Church and Socialism") she claimed that modern socialists are more faithful to the original principles of Christianity than the conservative clergy of today. Since the socialists struggle for a social order of equality, freedom and fraternity, the priests, if they honestly wanted to implement in the life of humanity the Christian principle "love thy neighbour as thyself," should welcome the socialist movement. When the clergy support the rich, and those who exploit and oppress the poor, they are in explicit contradiction with Christian teachings: they do serve not Christ but the Golden Calf. The first apostles of Christianity were passionate communists and the Fathers of the

Church (like Basil the Great and John Chrysostom) denounced social injustice. Today this cause is taken up by the socialist movement which brings to the poor the Gospel of fraternity and equality, and calls on the people to establish on earth the Kingdom of freedom and neighbour-love. Instead of waging a philosophical battle in the name of materialism, Rosa Luxemburg tried to rescue the social dimension of the Christian tradition for the labour movement.

ERNST BLOCH IS THE FIRST MARXIST AUTHOR WHO RADICALLY changed the theoretical framework—without abandoning the Marxist and revolutionary perspective. In a similar way to Engels, he distinguished two socially opposed currents: on one side the theocratic religion of the official churches, the opium of the people, a mystifying apparatus at the service of the powerful; on the other the underground, subversive and heretical religion of the Albigensians, the Hussites, Joachim de Flore, Thomas Münzer, Franz von Baader, Wilhelm Weitling and Leo Tolstoy. However, unlike Engels, Bloch refused to see religion uniquely as a "cloak" of class interests: he explicitly criticized this conception. In its protest and rebellious forms religion is one of the most significant forms of *utopian* consciousness, one of the richest expressions of the *Principle of Hope*.

Basing himself on these philosophical presuppositions, Bloch develops a heterodox and iconoclastic interpretation of the Bible—both the Old and the New Testaments—drawing out the *Biblia pauperum* (bible of the poor) which denounces the Pharaohs and calls on each and everyone to choose either Caesar or Christ.

A religious atheist—according to him only an atheist can be a good Christian and vice-versa—and a theologian of the revolution, Bloch not only produced a Marxist reading of millenarianism (following Engels) but also—and this was new—a *millenarian interpretation of Marxism*, through which the socialist struggle for the Kingdom of Freedom is perceived as the direct heir of the eschatological and collectivist heresies of the past.

Of course Bloch, like the young Marx of the famous 1844 quotation, recognized the dual character of the religious phenomenon, its oppressive aspect as well as its potential for revolt. The first requires the use of what he calls "the cold stream of Marxism": the relentless materialist analysis of ideologies, idols and idolatries. The second one however requires "the warm



Ernst Bloch did not view religion simply as a "cloak of class interests".

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stream of Marxism," seeking to rescue religion's *utopian cultural surplus*, its critical and anticipatory force. Beyond any "dialogue," Bloch dreamt of an authentic union between Christianity and revolution, like the one which came into being during the Peasant Wars of the 16th century.

BLOCH'S VIEWS WERE, TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, SHARED BY SOME of the German radical scholars known as the Frankfurt School. Max Horkheimer considered that "religion is the record of the wishes, nostalgias and indictments of countless generations." Erich Fromm, in his book *The Dogma of Christ* (1930), used Marxism and psychoanalysis to illuminate the Messianic, plebeian, egalitarian and anti-authoritarian essence of primitive Christianity. And the writer Walter Benjamin tried to combine, in a unique and original synthesis, theology and Marxism, Jewish Messianism and historical materialism, class struggle and redemption.

Lucien Goldmann's work *The Hidden God* (1955) is another path-breaking attempt at renewing the Marxist study of religion. Although of a very different inspiration than Bloch, he was also interested in redeeming the moral and human value of religious tradition. The most surprising and original part of his book is the attempt to compare—without assimilating one to another—*religious faith* and *Marxist faith*: both have in common the refusal of pure individualism (rationalist or empiricist) and the belief in *trans-individual values*. God for religion, the human community for socialism. In both cases the faith is based on a *wager*—the wager on the existence of God and the Marxist wager on the liberation of humanity—that presupposes risk, the danger of failure and the hope of success. Both imply some fundamental belief which is not demonstrable on the exclusive level of factual judgements. What separates them is of course the suprahistorical character of religious transcendence: "The Marxist faith is a faith in the *historical future* that human beings themselves make, or rather that we must make by our activity, a 'wager' in the success of our actions; the transcendence that is the object of this faith is neither supernatural nor transhistorical, but supra-individual, nothing more but also nothing less." Without wanting in any way to "Christianize Marxism," Lucien Goldmann introduced, thanks to the concept of *faith*, a new way of looking at the conflictual relationship between religious belief and Marxist atheism.

Marx and Engels thought religion's subversive role was a thing of the past, which no longer had any significance in the epoch of modern class struggle. This forecast was more or less historically confirmed for a century – with a few important exceptions (particularly in France): the Christian socialists of

the 1930s, the worker priests of the 1940s, the left-wing of the Christian unions in the 1950s, etc.

But to understand what has been happening for the last thirty years in Latin America (and to a lesser extent also in other continents) around the issue of Liberation Theology we need to integrate into our analysis the insights of Bloch and Goldmann on the utopian potential of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

What is sorely lacking in these "classical" Marxist discussions on religion is a discussion of the implications of religious doctrines and practices for women.

Patriarchy, unequal treatment of women, and the denial of reproductive rights prevail among the main religious denominations – particularly Judaism, Christianity and Islam – and take extremely oppressive forms among fundamentalist currents. In fact, one of the key criteria for judging the progressive or regressive character of religious movements is their attitude towards women, and particularly on their right to control their own bodies: divorce, contraception, abortion. A renewal of Marxist reflection on religion in the twenty-first century requires us to put the issue of women's rights at the center of the argument. ★

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## RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM: US STYLE

# Before and after 9/11

In the cultural upheaval of the 1960s and '70s, while millions of Americans opposed war and marched for desegregation and women's right to full equality, many others found inspiration in the certainties of their Christian faith. By 1976 a Gallup Poll found one-third of all Americans had experienced a conversion, or a process of being "born again." The same poll found about half of all Protestants and about a third of all Catholics believed that the Bible was "to be taken literally, word for word." According to Steve Bruce in "Pray TV: Televangelism in America", almost 60% of Protestants and 40% of Catholics were evangelical, that is, eager to recruit others to their beliefs. This evangelicalism is not just limited to the printed word, but has led to the establishment of Christian radio and TV, much of which is controlled by the Christian right. In 1986 three of the top eleven Christian shows were hosted by the right-wing evangelicals: Pat Robertson's 700 Club, Jerry Falwell's The Old Time Gospel Hour and Jim Bakker's show.

A survey conducted in the late '80s found that among the "baby boomer" generation (people born between 1946-63) one-third accepted the biblical version of creation over evolution and agreed that "temptations are the work of the devil." Most considered themselves "moderate" but 13% classified themselves as "fundamentalists." It is this latter grouping that is the cohesive core we can identify as the Christian right.

"Born again" Christians face the same stress and conflicts and are immersed in the same culture as the rest of us. In fact, evangelicals have a slightly higher divorce rate than the general population. And although the religious right opposes abortion under any circumstance, one out of six women who have an abortion considers herself a "born again" Christian.

Dianne Feeley is an editor of the bi-monthly socialist magazine, *Against the Current*, and a member of US socialist group Solidarity.

BY DIANNE FEELEY



Massive evangelical gatherings for men, such as those organized by the Promise Keepers, are aimed at upholding patriarchal relationships of men as the "heads of households", while many in the Christian Right claim that these gatherings challenge sexism and racism.

In fact, some of these women have created their own niche in the anti-abortion movement. "Silent No More" groups began to emulate pro-choice speakouts by testifying about abortions they now regret. At one recent public event there was a display of baby shoes labeled with the names of the unborn. These women have also testified at various public hearings against abortion and claim it is a dangerous procedure that can lead to cancer. When reporters point out that no scientific proof supports this assertion they reply that the scientific "establishment" can't tell the truth because of the liberal stranglehold over society!

### CULTURAL UPHEAVAL AND US PROTESTANTISM

Throughout US history important social tensions have played out through religion. One cannot understand the Salem witch

trials or the battles over slavery and women's rights without studying the development of US Protestantism. Over the course of the 19th century dominant US Christian religions replaced the Calvinist notion of the sinner being helpless before God and predetermined for either goodness or evil, with one in which individual choice was central. The individual could choose to respond to God's plan of salvation by adjusting to social change rather than fighting to preserve the old ways. With few possessions and one's Bible, youth would leave the family farm and head for new opportunities. In this new world hard work and thrift would lead to success and therefore good standing in the eyes of God. The reality, of course, was far more complex. Indeed, alcoholism became a widespread social problem as the growing work force attempted to adjust to the new rhythms of industrial and urban life. By the late 19th century a new form of Protestantism arose: fundamentalism. Its roots were in the populist movement but it,

like many 19th century populists, quickly became conservative. This brand of conservative Protestantism proudly defined God's chosen people as white Anglo-Saxons. Early fundamentalist preachers such as Billy Sunday were convinced that American social and political structures were superior because they had been built by God's chosen people. Thus fundamentalism justified imperialism.

Along with the even greater emphasis on reading the Bible, fundamentalists have been preoccupied with pinpointing the end of the world. There are a variety of opinions about when and how Christ's second coming will occur, but most believe God has divided human history into several ages, or "dispensations." According to this line of thinking, we are living in the final stage, where current events like earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, wars, political crises and social decay are all warnings from God. Indeed, both the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the 1967 Six-Day War, in which Israel seized East Jerusalem and the West Bank, are viewed as signs that the end is near. For that reason most US fundamentalist Christians are staunchly pro-Zionist.

Since the 1950s the more moderate Protestant denominations have declined as the theologically conservative ones grew dramatically. Part of the reason for this continuous growth of fundamentalism is its aggressive proselytizing, and its claims to have answers to both the alienation, isolation and commodification in modern capitalist society, as well as the changing role of the family. Within the fundamentalist community there are supportive institutions in which one's family can flourish safe from the chaos and conflict outside. This siege mentality fuels political activism and is driven by the need to accomplish one's work before the millennium brings such possibilities to a close. Fundamentalists view themselves as a beleaguered group under attack by the establishment, who stands before them as a Goliath in opposition to their role as David.

The specific evangelical churches that are the fastest growing are the ones which are the most adaptive, with worship services that use popular rock music, have casual dress codes and cater to youth, newlyweds and singles. Mark Shibley, a sociologist of religion, concluded that these are growing because they have become more like the surrounding culture, not less. These evan-

gelicals are undoubtedly a less supportive subculture for the Christian Right than the more fundamental evangelical ones.

#### WHAT THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT WANTS

Christian fundamentalists are backed by a whole range of institutions and organizations, from private schools and home schooling networks to Bible Institutes, colleges, radio and TV programs, publishing houses and legal centers dedicated to advancing a conservative agenda. (Note: Home schooling is not just a project of the fundamentalists, but they have built a network of fundamentalist educational materials that reinforce their specific views.) The Christian Right demands society accept and conform to its notion of what it means to be a good family and a good citizen in God's kingdom. It is a social, political and religious movement that wants the government to regulate and maintain traditional hierarchical relations



between men and women and between parents and children. It sees the role of the state as enforcer of "moral" (read: sexual) behavior. That's why the right of homosexuals to marry represents to them the beginning of the end of society. They ask, "what next? Polygamy? Bestiality?"

Yet, from this perspective, poverty is seen not as a moral issue but as the result of individual bad luck or bad behavior. Because the Christian Right views hierarchy as natural and positive, it is not both-

ered by inequalities of wealth and power. The Bush administration has attempted to alter domestic government programs that aid poor or low-wage working families by funding "faith-based" solutions to various social problems. This has enabled the administration to privatize services, reward its conservative religious base, reach out to other church-based programs and hook them into the network as well as fund particular right-wing approaches to social issues. Sexual education programs advocate abstinence. After-school reading and math programs teach specific skills that reflect the kinds of tests the "No Child Left Behind" legislation mandates. And the "faith-based" programs successfully compete with the community-service programs that already have a proven track record in terms of social service provision.

According to Sara Diamond, who has followed the evangelical Right for years, the Christian Right can be considered partly oppositional and partly system-supportive. It is oppositional to mass culture, which explains why the United States has such sharp culture wars. But it glorifies America's past and more or less supports its present economic system. However, even though it "accepts" that America and its social institutions are good, this provincial nationalism does not coincide with Corporate America's globalization project—even if Christian fundamentalist support to Israel reinforces US policy in the Middle East. Thus there is an inherent contradiction in its alliance with the Republican Party.

According to the Christian Right, one of the big problems in society today is a lack of religion. In 1980 Tim LaHaye, a founder of the Moral Majority, published *The Battle for the Mind*. Widely circulated, this book explains that there is a vast conspiracy involving Hollywood movie producers, Unitarian churches, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). From a Christian right perspective, these opinion-shapers are out to harm Bible believers because they deny God's sovereignty. That is, moral conditions become worse because of people's attempts to solve their problems independently of God. Ultimately, it is the "secular humanists" who are causing the problem.

To fix the problems of society, then,



Emotionally-charged ceremonies mobilize the constituency of the Christian Right.

requires the “moral majority” getting involved in the electoral process and taking charge, either as candidates or as workers assisting the right kind of candidate. The Christian Right first developed several single-issue campaigns against the Equal Rights Amendment and against the liberalization of abortion. It also developed a network of organizations and Christian schools out of opposition to desegregation orders.

The Christian Right developed a “hit list” of congressmen who it felt were particularly anti-Christian, anti-family and against ‘traditional values’. By 1982, as a result of the combined efforts of the New Right and the Christian Right, two million new voters went to the polls. Not only was Ronald Reagan elected president, with white fundamentalists accounting for two-thirds of his lead, but 23 out of 27 oppositional congressmen targeted by the fundamentalists lost.

However, the Christian Right didn’t manage to get much from the Reagan and Bush I tenure. Instead they were drawn into supporting right-wing military regimes in Central America. Not only did the Christian Right identify with these regimes because they carried out their repression under an anti-communist banner, but right-wing evangelicals such as Guatemala’s Rios Montt led the military command. The Christian Right mobilized their constituency through publications and media programming, justifying death squads in Guatemala and El Salvador and terrorist contras in opposition to the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. They were so eager to collaborate with the White House in this anti-communist crusade that the battle for family values was relegated to state and local fights.

However the local skirmishes had important national repercussions. These included defeat of the federal Equal Rights Amendment, where only 35 out of the necessary 38 states ratified the amendment before the deadline, as well as hundreds of legislative restrictions on abortion.

#### ANTI-ABORTION ACTIVISM

During the 1980s grassroots anti-abortionists developed several dozen clinics that advertised themselves as abortion referral services and offered free pregnancy tests. While women waited for their results, they were forced to watch a presentation about the alleged dangers of abortion. Several women filed lawsuits and the clinics were forced to cease their false advertising. Today, a network of about 3,000 “Crisis Pregnancy Centers” advertising as abortion alternatives rely on their powers of persuasion and narrowly circumscribed ‘help’ which includes: offering free pregnancy tests, legal and medical advice, adoption information, and infant and maternity clothes. At least a third are operated by two umbrella organizations, one Catholic and one Protestant.

But if one section of the anti-abortion movement was willing to put energy into manipulating pregnant women, and another larger grouping was willing to lobby to restrict abortion at the state level, still another strategy included direct action.

As soon as abortion was legalized in 1973, anti-abortionists developed a series of harassment tactics. These included picketing hospitals and clinics, where the bulk of all abortions were performed, and harassing clinic personnel by following them home, distributing flyers to their neighbors, or picketing their houses. Joseph Scheidler, a Catholic from Chicago,

developed the tactic of deploying “sidewalk counselors”—people who would attempt to convince any woman walking into the clinic not to have an abortion. But with the founding of Operation Rescue in 1986 by Randall Terry, a graduate of the Pentecostal Elim Bible Institute and a used car salesman, Catholic dominance of the anti-abortion movement dissolved. By 1990 *Time* magazine estimated that anti-abortion activists were two-thirds evangelicals and one-third Catholic.

Operation Rescue gained national publicity in the summer of 1988 with its four-month siege of Atlanta, during which over 1200 people were arrested. Staged to coincide with the Democratic Party’s national convention in Atlanta, the action galvanized clinic blockades across the country. But the publicity also sparked pro-choice mobilizations and injunctions to bar the “rescuers” from blockading and entering clinics. Between 1988-90 there were more than 400 blockades. By 1991-93 the number had fallen to 170 although there was an increase in incidents of property damage, hate mail and harassing phone calls. Finding the strategy of mass arrests difficult to sustain and having lost a lawsuit brought by the National Organization for Women, Operation Rescue (OR) activists switched to a “No Place to Hide” campaign, targeting doctors who performed abortions.

The campaign developed “Wanted” Posters that contained a photograph of the doctor and detailed her/his daily activities. The inflammatory rhetoric about doctors being “baby killers” eventually culminated in the murder of five clinic personnel in 1992-93. However, the murders and subsequent public reaction prodded Congress into passing the *Freedom of Access to Clinic*

*Entrances Act* in 1993. Previously, doctors who performed abortions were usually forced to take elaborate precautions to ensure their safety. But as public opinion reacted sharply against the murders, and as clinic violence was now made a federal offense, attacks on clinics slowly declined.

#### STRATEGIES AND EXPERTISE

The Christian Coalition, under the leadership of Ralph Reed, created a network of local fundamentalist activists. Through its annual Road to Victory conferences it trained them in the nuts-and-bolts techniques of organizing. The Coalition stressed working at the precinct level to get a majority of Christian conservatives elected as delegates to their state Republican parties. They aimed to run for city councils, school boards and state legislatures.

The Coalition also encouraged its members to work within other conservative organizations. Most important has been the Concerned Women for America, founded by Beverly LaHaye in 1979. She organized women into prayer chapters first to oppose passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and then later to become "kitchen table lobbyists." By 1991 they worked hard to win Clarence Thomas' confirmation to the U.S. Supreme Court, cheering him on when he arrived in the Senate hearing room to testify. They also lobbied for Congressional passage of the *Defense of Marriage Act*, which allows states to deny the legality of gay marriages (1996).

Another leading organization is the Family Research Council (FRC) headed by

Gary Bauer, a domestic policy adviser for Reagan who served as undersecretary in the Department of Education. By the mid-1990s the Council had a mailing list of 250,000, a staff of seventy and a budget of \$10 million. Bauer's FRC works closely with Dr. Dobson's Focus on the Family. The two organizations provide congresspeople with research on "pro-family" issues.

By the 1992 Republican Party convention, an estimated 47% of the delegates described themselves as "born again" Christians. Of the 2,000 delegates, 300 were members of the Christian Coalition. They secured, over the objection of other

*The 1994 elections were an incredible breakthrough for the Christian Right. In a midterm election, where turnout is generally low, they probably mobilized four million activists and reached 50 million voters.*

delegates, a party platform demanding a ban on all abortions, opposing civil rights for gays and lesbians, calling on the government to stop the sale of pornography and to condemn "obscene" art. The platform also endorsed school prayer and home schooling and opposed making contraceptives available in public schools.

Bush's defeat that November was widely perceived as a rejection of that religious war. But without the support of the Christian right – indeed, the Christian Coalition distributed forty million voter guides to 246,000 churches – Republicans would have suffered even greater defeat, for according to Reed, evangelicals provided 46% of Bush's total vote.

#### Has the Christian Right overplayed its hand in the Terri Schiavo case?

Terri's parents asked Randall Terry [founder of anti-choice group Operation Rescue—*NS*] to act as their spokesperson and mobilize support in front of the nursing home. But the expected crowd never materialized. Anti-abortion zealots were interviewed at the site, but the size of the vigils peaked at roughly 100. Terri's parents asked them to leave a few days before her death. Perhaps they were an embarrassment.

At first, the media spun the case in a way that associated it with the Christian Right crusade "for life". But within a week, reporters shifted their focus to how the case was a personal tragedy for the people involved and not part of a Christian Right cause.

In Congress, politicians repeatedly denounced the judiciary for accepting the findings of neurologists and granting Michael Schiavo's request not to prolong Terri's life. But the law they passed didn't stop the courts.

The Christian Right used the Terri Schiavo case to try to convince the population that the legal system is out of control and must be reigned in. The most prized target is the US Supreme Court, which has trimmed women's right to abortion over the last thirty years without actually banning it. The right feels it has earned the ability to influence public policy, but it does not see its agenda being implemented. This frustration and impatience is hopefully the sign of its coming downfall.—D.F.

#### THE CLINTON ERA

The Republican Party, with much help from the Christian Right, was able to defeat some of Clinton's earliest and most important proposals and delayed or sabotaged his appointments. Most importantly, despite the fact that Clinton carefully avoided a single-payer health care plan, the Christian Right worked hard to defeat his so-called reform. The victories of the Christian Right showed that they had the capacity to work around issues without seeming to appear too dogmatic.

The 1994 elections were an incredible breakthrough for the Christian Right. In a

midterm election, where turnout is generally low, they probably mobilized four million activists and reached 50 million voters. Exit polls revealed that about 25% of those who voted were white evangelicals, 70% of whom voted Republican. Congressional candidates backed by the Christian Coalition won 55% of their campaigns and fully 25% of the elected first-term representatives were members of evangelical churches.

The Republican agenda was the "Contract with America". Although this 10-point Contract didn't seem to have the fingerprints of the Christian right all over it, Ralph Reed detailed the behind-the-scenes negotiations over its provisions in his 1995 book, *Active Faith*. While Reed originally raised three proposals to be included—parental choice legislation around abortion, a permanent ban on taxpayer funding on abortion and a tax cut for families with children – Newt Gingrich explained that his goal was to have the Contract signed by all incumbent Republicans. Therefore, abortion and "other contentious issues" would have to be put on the back burner.

Reed reluctantly agreed provided the Republicans move quickly on the tax cut and work on social issues after the first hundred days in office. That is, the leaders of the Christian fundamentalist movement were willing to bide their time in building

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## SHARIA LAW

# Religious arbitration and the privatization of law



Amina Sherazee speaking at an anti-war rally.

## *An interview with Amina Sherazee*

On January 17th, 2005, former Ontario Attorney General Marion Boyd recommended that the province of Ontario allow religious law—such as Muslim law, also known as “sharia”—to be used in private arbitration to settle commercial and family disputes if parties agree to it. Private arbitration is touted as a wonderful voluntary alternative to the public court system. Boyd’s report examining the question of religious arbitration was commissioned by current Attorney General Michael Bryant. **NEIL BRAGANZA** interviewed Toronto lawyer and human rights activist **AMINA SHERAZEE** for *New Socialist* on March 23rd, 2005.

**Neil Braganza:** *What would sharia arbitration in Ontario involve? How would it work?*

**Amina Sherazee:** To be honest, I don’t think sharia arbitration is workable. There is a lot of ambiguity and uncertainty as to how it would be implemented, monitored and applied. The proposal is that sharia arbitration involve informal forums adjudicated by qualified arbitrators who are members of arbitration societies and have some training in arbitration principles (though not necessarily formal legal training). Arbitrators, of course, would also have to have some awareness of sharia law.

Now it is important to point out that there are different schools of thought in Islam. There are different interpretations of the various tenets of sharia by various Muslims communities. There are different religious sects, with different religious precepts, and all this is complicated by

different cultural interpretations of those religious precepts. There is no one universal codified Muslim law because the laws vary according to different schools of thought. There are the Shias, the Sunnis and the different branches of Sunnism and Shiaism. Nevertheless, the proponents of sharia arbitration are proposing that it involve the arbitration of family law matters, and inheritance matters, and of course commercial arbitration.

**NB:** *Why do people, especially those in Muslim communities, oppose the idea of sharia civil arbitration? What is the concern about the impact it might have on women?*

**AS:** The organizations I represent and am familiar with are not opposed to the use of sharia law for commercial arbitration. They have no problem with two parties who share commercial interests and who are more or less equal using sharia law to settle commercial disputes. However, there is a

problem with using religious arbitration to deal with what should properly be seen as public and social issues. For example, though the regulations of family law, child welfare, inheritance rights and so on all relate to property rights and disputes between private citizens, those disputes—for instance, disputes over the division of property and support for ex-spouses and children, the feminization of poverty and the best interest of children—concern and impact on the public at large. In our society, we try to regulate these issues through law because it is widely recognized that these issues have an impact on the public and on how we relate to one another. People in Muslim communities who are opposed to sharia arbitration don’t want these public issues to become privatized. Rather, they understand and appreciate that aside from the law there are social relationships between people that determine how (or whether) legal rights are exercised. These relationships—for example, gender inequality, or inequalities of economic and financial power—are public issues and problems because they cut across

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*Amina Sherazee is a staff lawyer at Downtown Legal Services in Toronto and a human rights activist. Neil Braganza is a member of CUPE 3903 at York University and a member of the New Socialist Group.*

all cultural and religious communities. We don't want people—who more likely than not will be women—being put in the position of having to bargain away their rights just to acquire a standard of living for themselves and their children.

Now, because we are dealing with sharia we have to look at the occurrence of these inequalities within Muslim societies. There have been very conservative interpretations of sharia, and there is no way to monitor the prevalence of such interpretations in arbitration hearings. For this reason sharia arbitration can have a very adverse impact on women. Plus, because Muslim women often face cultural and linguistic barriers, threats of stigmatization and pressures of assimilation—all made worse by their economic inequality—there is no reliable way to guarantee that women's legal rights will be protected in sharia arbitration hearings.

Another reason for opposing sharia is that it undermines the rule of law and that it is a move to establish a different set of laws for Canadians in the Muslim communities. This raises major questions about

**NB:** *In your opinion, why is the Canadian government considering this now, and whose interests would be served with the introduction of sharia arbitration?*

**AS:** The Ontario government is dealing with it now because there was a lot of media controversy after the Islamic Civil Institute announced that it was already using sharia law in binding arbitration of family disputes. The announcement came as a surprise to many of us. People started asking why this is being allowed and why this is occurring. The proponents of sharia responded by saying that religious arbitration was permitted under the *Arbitration Act*. Opponents to sharia disputed this, arguing that there is nothing in the Act that allows people to use sharia in family law and child welfare matters. Furthermore, opponents charged that it is very problematic that groups are claiming that the right to religious arbitration is a given. This whole debate probably would not have happened if the issue did not receive the profile it did in the media.

The second part of your question asks



Homa Arjomand,  
coordinator of the  
International  
Campaign against  
Sharia Court in  
Canada questions  
Marion Boyd  
about the lack of  
protection for  
human rights in  
the Arbitration Act  
of 1991.

the marginalization and segregation of Muslims from the rest of society. So the concerns are twofold. The first concern is how inequality is going to play out in perpetuating discrimination within Muslim communities. The second concern is that the different application of different laws is going to ghettoize and exclude Muslims from the rest of society.

whose interests are served by introducing sharia. There are two main interests that are served. First, sharia arbitration serves the interests of the elite within the Muslim communities in that it gives them a way to determine property matters to their benefit. Some sharia law can be construed to serve the interests of men over women because it can be read to stipulate, for

instance, that a woman is only entitled to a quarter of the inheritance that a male heir is entitled to. Furthermore, some rules around custody and child and spousal support payments and support rights are very much in favour of men. So it serves the interests of the patriarchal economic elite.

Second, I think that sharia law to a great extent serves the interests of the government. Religious arbitration is a way for the government to offload many of the services it should be providing to make the legal system more relevant, responsive and accessible to religious, cultural and racial communities. To properly remedy the lack of legal services, the government would have to do a complete overhaul of the legal system: it would have to make the judiciary more representative, it would have to provide interpretation and cultural services, it would have to incorporate the values of litigants into both legal procedure and some of the law itself, and so on. Religious arbitration is a great way for the Ontario government to avoid these responsibilities by claiming that groups can just regulate themselves on their own and meet their own needs. This frees the government to narrow its focus to the dominant cultures of society while claiming that special minority groups are both marginal to public interest and an unnecessary financial strain on the system.

In other words, religious arbitration is about the privatization of law and the privatization of legal services. Furthermore, it's about not having to address the current inequality and discrimination that exists within the legal system. For instance, if you look at the judiciary on the federal level you'll see that there is isn't a single person of colour who is a judge—not one! In the provincial courts in Ontario it was not until 1989 (yes, 1989!) that we had the first black judge. I just read in the news that by the year 2017 visible minorities are going to be the visible majority. But if that's the case then the composition of the judiciary should be reflecting that reality. Establishing sharia arbitration is a way for the government to avoid dealing with racism and exclusion in the legal system.

Now, proponents of religious arbitration claim it is less expensive and more accessible. But that's only because legal aid has been eroded by underfunding. When proponents romanticize religious arbitration as being cheaper and more informal,

their argument relies on the fact that the current legal system is in disrepair. For example, proponents claim that a husband and wife can duke it out in an arbitration court in front of an arbitrator who charges them very little money or no money at all, and that this will be a quick, easy and cheap way for the couple to settle their dispute. But at the same time, proponents claim that if you don't have arbitration, you'll have to get a lawyer, go through a completely inaccessible court system, suffer long delays, pay for your own lawyer and so forth. Thus, there's a lot of scaremongering used to sell religious arbitration to communities. Furthermore, this plays on and reinforces the problems because it accepts a completely racist, classist and inaccessible legal system. Rather than taking up the larger task of making the legal system more

accessible and less discriminatory and racist, proponents of religious arbitration are offering people a way to accommodate these inequalities and live with them. These inequalities exist because the government has abdicated its responsibility to properly fund legal aid. Proponents of sharia are trying to push litigants into the private resolution of their disputes, and the government is trying to get out of the business of governance and permit the privatization of resolving family breakdown.

**NB:** *How would you make sense of the move to introduce sharia law in the context of the general crackdown on Muslims since September 11th, 2001?*

**AS:** I think it's a further marginalization and a further exclusion of that community from services and legal entitlements. The

way Muslims are being treated by the courts is a by-product of the racial exclusion that Muslims have faced historically. The indefinite incarceration of Muslims under the draconian security certificate process, the routine violation of their due process rights and the fact that there are no Muslims in the federal judiciary—these are all examples of the systemic marginalization and exclusion of Muslims. Sharia arbitration is part of this pattern because it is a way for the government to acknowledge these problems but at the same time transfer the responsibility for solving these problems from itself to Muslim communities.

It is important to trace out how the government is contradicting itself here. Marion Boyd's report recommends that sharia law be allowed because, in general, religious arbitration should be allowed. But if you look at her actual recommendations, they not only interpret the law as it is, but propose to change the law. For example, there are recommendations for many amendments to the *Family Law Act*, the *Arbitration Act*, and to the *Child Law Reform Act*. So the question is: if the Ontario government needs to amend the law to make religious arbitration legal, why is it allowing religious arbitration to happen right now? Doesn't this mean that the religious arbitration that is happening today in Ontario is happening illegally? And if it is happening illegally, how can anyone claim that it has any legitimacy?

The answer to this last question raises more issues. When the groups I represent were invited to give deputations to Marion Boyd, we were informed that when she was the Attorney General at the time that the *Arbitration Act* was passed in 1991, she intended for it to apply to family arbitration. Why? Because she claimed Jewish leaders had lobbied her to permit religious arbitration. However, nowhere in the legislation is this clearly reflected. The sharia law debate is exposing all this back-room wheeling and dealing. And now, the people who were not part of those deals are demanding that the process be made more open and democratic. Rather than allowing Boyd—who is now a private consultant—to interpret the law in response to people who happen to have her ear, the government should be saying that religious arbitration is illegal until the proper process is followed to make it legal. After all, despite Boyd's willingness to respond to whatever voice manages to lobby her, as it stands

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now there is nothing in the *Arbitration Act* that says that religious-based arbitration is allowed, and her report confirms that.

The position of the Muslim groups opposed to sharia is that we would like a statement from the Attorney General saying that what's happening right now is illegal and it should be prohibited. And if supporters of religious arbitration want it to be sanctioned and made legal, then there has to be a proper legislative debate on the issue. In a way, Marion Boyd's report usurps parliamentary process. What is supposed to happen is that a parliamentary committee studies a law and creates a bill. The bill is supposed to be debated within the committee, and the committee is supposed to receive and incorporate submissions from the public. The bill is then supposed to be debated in parliament, and if it passes third reading it becomes law. But instead of striking up a parliamentary committee, the government hired a private consultant (Boyd). The Boyd report is thus a sneaky way to undermine public debate on laws before they are enacted. So, not only does the content of the Boyd report represent, effectively, a call to privatize legal services, but the very manner in which that report was commissioned and produced represents a move to privatize parliamentary procedure. What we are seeing is the privatization of government and the privatization of legal services and justice. I think that is the biggest concern around religious arbitration. And clearly this should not just be the concern of the Muslim community but the concern of all.

**NB:** *What would the government have to fear from broader consultation?*

**AS:** The government wants to avoid a much needed overhaul of the legal system. Those who support religious arbitration and Boyd's usurpation of parliamentary process isolate the debate and try to make it very insular. But the truth is that the issue has implication for general law. Keeping the issue insular prevents us from asking why our legal system doesn't reflect the needs and concerns of various groups in this province. It prevents us from asking how we could change the system for the better, or asking about an entirely different system. That deeper conversation would involve everyone. Even non-Muslims would be involved in the debate. But if it is framed as a "sharia law" debate then a broader discussion suddenly becomes unnecessary.

Furthermore, by hiring a private consultant to study what is framed as a very private and narrow issue, what the Attorney General is doing is in fact allowing the dominant members of certain groups to petition that consultant and influence her. After all, who are the most vocal? The most vocal are the most organized, and the most organized are the most financially capable. So that's another big problem with this process. It's keeping a lid on the Pandora's box instead of opening the Pandora's box in a very public and democratic manner and actually dealing with what comes out of it.

**NB:** *Any last thoughts?*

**AS:** The reason I don't think we should have religious-based arbitration is that we need one law to apply to everyone. The only way to accommodate different values and different religions is to do so within the one publicly funded and controlled legal and judicial system, not by creating substandard procedures and systems for different groups. Creating sub-systems of adjudication ghettoizes and marginalizes those who are already marginalized. It not only segregates a community, it contributes to the further marginalization of people who are already marginalized within that community. This moves them farther away from the public eye and makes it more difficult for them to fight back to reclaim their rights.

So, religious arbitration establishes a very dangerous slippery slope towards the privatization of public matters. Its proponents use the concept of "multiculturalism" as a justification to segregate people and give them a different standard by which they will be judged. That's not multiculturalism. Real multiculturalism means integrating the margin into the centre. I think that the philosophy behind Marion Boyd's report is that groups should have "equal but different" treatment. But, as Martin Luther King has informed us, the principle of "equal but different" is precisely the rhetoric used to justify segregation. Rather than isolation and exclusion from the mainstream, we need desegregation and incorporation into the mainstream. ★

## US Fundamentalism

*Continued from Page 27*

up alliances that would eventually lead to their demands.

### THE 21ST CENTURY

With two decades of organizing experience, and having won some clear victories, the Christian Right nonetheless feels dissatisfied with its lack of results. They had become the backbone of the Republican Party, but were confined—constantly told to behave themselves and unable to achieve what they wanted. Having gained a place in the Republican Party, they have not been able to move their agenda forward.

They are not content with winning referendums opposing gay marriage in an envi-

ronment where lesbians and gays are more accepted in US society than ever before. Despite Senator John Kerry's assertions that "abortion should be the rarest thing in the world", they still know that however circumscribed by restrictions, abortion is still legal. One of their very own people, John Ashcroft, was US Attorney General for four years, yet the Roe v. Wade ruling remains in force. The ranks of the Christian right are asking themselves: What kind of "power" is this?

9/11 brought a sea change to US politics. Fighting "the war on terror" (not the issues of abortion, evolution and gay rights) elected Bush II in 2004. That election has scared the liberal mainstream even further, opening up even more space for the Christian Right to inhabit. Today, with the Republicans entrenched as the ruling party

and multiple Supreme Court appointments likely pending, the fundamentalists feel truly empowered to advance an openly anti-feminist, anti-secular and especially anti-Muslim agenda. Time will tell how aggressively, and with what success, they press their demands on Congress and the Bush regime. ★

*The author recommends the work of Sara Diamond, who has written several books on the Christian right, including Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right. She would also recommend the work of Stephanie Coontz, whose latest book is Marriage: A History from Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage.*

# THE MIDDLE EAST Under the reign of imperialism and fundamentalisms

BY SHAHZAD MOJAB

In December 2004, I travelled to the Middle East as part of my research exploring Kurdish women's struggles for democracy and justice. I was unable to go to the Kurdish region of Iraq, where I had visited four years earlier. In Turkey, however, I visited several women's centres in Istanbul and three Kurdish cities, listening to and learning from enthusiastic and dynamic Kurdish women activists about their visions and aspirations for transforming their lives and societies.

These women were fully conscious of the many dimensions of their problems and struggles. Many are organizing against violence rooted in the ancient institution of patriarchy, both in the private sphere of the family and the public sphere of the state.

The challenges are enormous. Women and men are suffering from many forms of violence including war, militarism, poverty, national oppression, displacement, forced urbanization, army and police brutality, and environmental destruction. In all of these cases, the Turkish state and the US are seen as main actors, in spite of the fact that the media, educational system and official propaganda treat the state and its army as sacrosanct. More significantly, though, the state and its international supporters are not the only sources of trouble. State power is exercised with all its brutality in the midst of the equally brutal exercise of power by the male gender, religion, tribalism, feudalism and capitalism. Women are the main target of this combination of powers.

In dealing with the Middle East, be it Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine, Iraq or Turkey, some activists on the left are not willing to comprehend the significance of domestic regimes of exploitation and oppression. They see only one centre of destruction: Western imperialism. They generally ignore the domestic order, and how it is tied to imperialism.

Such a politics is politically destructive. It separates domestic exploitation and oppression from global capitalism. It minimizes or ignores domestic repression, and, in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, confers on reactionary and repressive forces the status of freedom fighters (in Middle Eastern political culture as in Marxist traditions, the words "reaction" and its derivatives are borrowed from the French Revolution of 1789. As I use it here, it refers to a host of political agendas that advocate the perpetration of ethnic and nationalist supremacy, tribalism, feudalism, patriarchy and religious superstition). Paved with the good intention of forging solidarity with the targets of imperialist

aggression, this politics inevitably moves away from internationalism and enters into the realm of ethnocentrism and national chauvinism, as I will explain.

## LETTING DOMESTIC REACTION OFF THE HOOK

This kind of politics has a long history on the left. The most recent case is the approach of some of the left to Iraq, where there is a widespread and bloody resistance to the equally bloody US occupation. It is difficult to understand exactly what is going on in the resistance front. One can claim with certainty, however, that the great majority of non-Kurds resent the occupation. In the beginning of the third year of occupation, many Iraqis (especially non-Kurds) who were brutalized by the Ba'thist regime now long for the past.

The economic fabric of Iraq, which had been disrupted during the Iraq-Iran war of 1980-88, was further destroyed by the 1991 US war, a decade of sanctions, and two years of war since March 2003. The forces of tribalism and feudalism, which had been reinforced by Saddam Hussein during his wars against the Kurds and Iran, have been further unleashed by the current war. Different sects of political Islam have unleashed a brutal war against women and



Demonstration of Iranian women against Ayatolla Khomeini's statement regarding the veil, 1979. [www.iranchamber.com](http://www.iranchamber.com)

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others. If women could walk in public places more or less freely under the previous regime, now they can do so only in hijab and in the company of male relatives to protect them. Secular voices are being systematically silenced by part of this “resistance,” which exercises real power in the streets. The Shi’ite leadership, which is a major power block in the elected parliament, continues to demand a theocratic political order.

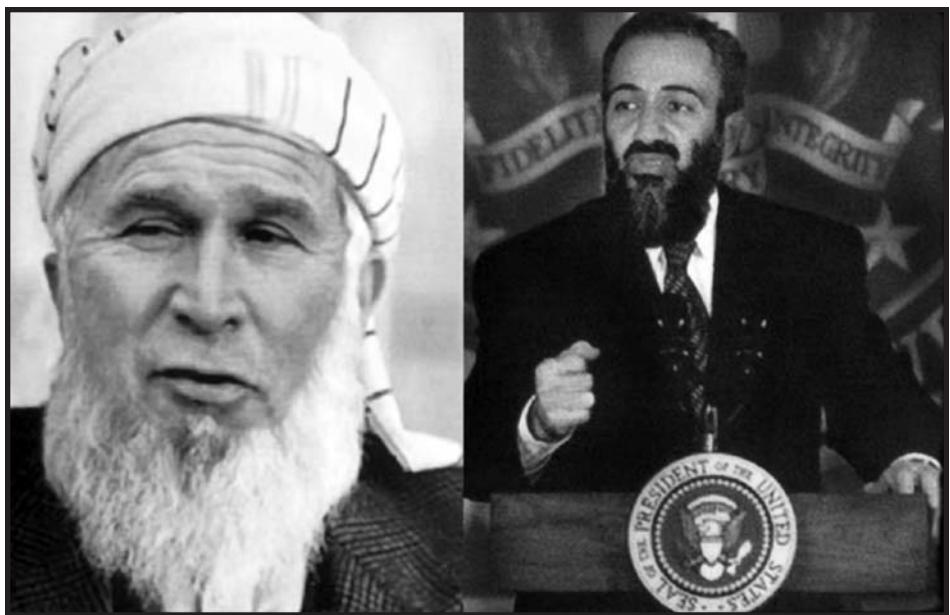
Part of this “resistance” uses methods such as blowing up civilians; their goal is to prevent the occupying power from establishing its client regime in the country, using any possible means. This is a war between two repressive orders: one is made up of political Islam and Ba’thists and the other is the US occupying power. Both sides use similar methods of warfare that qualify as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Two years is long enough to predict what kind of regime each side wants to impose on the peoples of Iraq.

The losers in this war are the majority of Iraqis, especially women, workers, peasants, secular people and the urban poor. The winners are a minority, although they are diverse and wield power, including Islamists, tribal and feudal lords, clergymen, new mafias and smuggler rings. The Ba’thists are removed from the seats of state power, but they are everywhere, and the US may eventually negotiate a settlement with them.

Much of the left is unable to see the symbiosis of local reactionaries and imperialism in Iraq, despite a long history of similar experiences. For example, the prominent US socialist James Petras argued in the Winter 2005 *Iran Bulletin: Middle East Forum* for unconditional support of all the Iraqi “resistance” in his article “Third World resistance and western intellectual solidarity.”

#### **IMPERIALISM, FUNDAMENTALISM AND RESISTANCE**

In recent wars in the Middle East, US imperialist power and Islamic fundamentalists are not on the opposite sides of a conflict. They do not form a contradiction. Historically and politically, Islamic fundamentalism and Western capitalism form a symbiosis, not a contradiction. The two sides have coexisted and benefited from this relationship, much as slavery and capitalism or democracy and racial apartheid



**There is a symbiosis between rule by local reactionaries in the Middle East and the western imperialist order. Both are similar in that they repress women, workers, peasants, secular people and the poor.**

coexisted in the West for about three centuries. Islamic fundamentalism and capitalism coexist, cohere, coincide and collude.

Equally significant is that there is no convergence of interest between the peoples of the Middle East and theocratic political Islam. There is, however, convergence between fundamentalism and capitalism in their patriarchal, militaristic, despotic, imperialistic and misogynist politics. Both rely on a culture of violence and fear.

If Western imperialist states foster mythologies such as “they do not have a democratic tradition,” much of the left inadvertently plays into this game by denying or forgetting or remaining uninformed about a century of struggles by women, workers, peasants, students, journalists and others in the Middle East. Since the late 1800s, imperial powers in the region have fought these social movements with all their might. As part of its crusade against communism after WWII, the US promoted Islam against the social movements.

Beginning in the late 19th century, democratic movements in the Middle East pursued a project for the separation of state and mosque. This struggle found its most radical expression in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11 in Iran. Throughout the twentieth century, most of the resistance against feudalism and colonialism in the Middle East was inspired and lead by secular leaders, whether leftist,

liberal, or conservative. The struggle against patriarchy, too, was primarily led by women and men who were communists and secular liberal democrats.

In the wake of WWII, the US gradually replaced the old colonial powers in the Middle East, Britain and France. In order to defeat both communism and liberal democracy, the US built up despotic military regimes, conducted coups and opposed freedom of the press and academic freedom. Part of this suppression of democracy was the US advice to its client regimes to use Muslim groups and individuals against communism, which in their view included all social movements.

This was done in many cases, including pitting the Muslim clergy against the nationalist regime in Iran in the early 1950s, Saudi Arabia’s use of Islam against Arab nationalist movements in Egypt, Oman and Palestine, the mobilizing, arming and training of any Muslim willing to fight the pro-Soviet regime of Afghanistan in the 1980s, Turkey’s use of an Islamic terrorist group against the secular Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and Israel’s support of Islamic forces against the Palestinian secular left leadership. When the second revolution in Iran was in the making in 1978, the US and other Western powers supported Islamic fundamentalists directly and indirectly. They could hardly tolerate what they feared would be the loss of Iran to communists, which they associated with Soviet domination over this oil-rich and strategically-vital country.

The anti-communism of the US impeded the struggle for democracy. It paralyzed the fight for separating the state and religion. It helped establish new theocracies in Iran and Afghanistan. While fundamentalist Islamic forces readily compromise with imperialism, they have no intention of offering any concessions to women, workers, national and religious minorities, or feminist, communist, or secular politics. Many leftists in the West fail to understand these dynamics of class struggle. Iraq "liberated" by Ba'thist terrorists or Islamic fundamentalist terrorists will be as reactionary as the client regime which is in the process of creation by the United States. In Iran, communists paid a heavy price by treating Khomeini as a "progressive force" only to be vilified and slaughtered by him once he replaced the Shah. Unlike Iraq's Islamists and Ba'thists, Khomeini did not yet have blood on his hands when he replaced the Shah.

Western leftists descend into ethnocentrism when they fail to treat the peoples of the Middle East as worthy of struggle for socialism, separation of state and religion, or even liberal democracy. This part of the left is not conscious about the class and gender dimensions of the war in Iraq or Afghanistan. Iranian theocrats, the Afghan Taliban and the Iraqi Islamists (both Shi'ite and Sunni) want to rule over the peoples and countries of the region. Once they achieve state power, Islamic political forces will conveniently share the booty with the US and its client states in the region. This is not surprising in so far as their main targets are the people and countries they rule or aspire to rule. Since Khomeini's 1979 assumption of power, political Islam almost everywhere demands no less than state rule.

#### **ISLAMOPHOBIA AND FUNDAMENTALISM**

The struggle of Middle Eastern peoples against political Islam should not be confused with the politics of Islamophobia fostered by the Bush administration in the post-September 11 days. Islamophobia and anti-Arabism, like anti-Semitism, are forms of racism, which the modern Western state appeals to in order to maintain its hegemony in times of crisis. One can oppose both political Islam (by advocating the separation of state and mosque) and Islamophobia.

The struggle against Islamophobia can succeed only if it is a project of overcoming



The Iraqi Women's League marches against the recent cancellation of laws that long provided some protections for the rights of Iraqi women. These changes mean that Iraqi women must rely on religious institutions rather than civilian courts for various matters, including marriage and divorce.

racism, and preventing the transformation of liberal democracy into fascism. Marxists, unlike most liberals, believe that liberal democracy is not simply democracy, it is capitalist democracy. They realize that capitalist democracy can transform into fascism, as it did in the 1930s in Europe. In Germany the transformation occurred through democratic elections. This can happen again, especially under conditions of crisis, or even the perception of a serious crisis. The most liberal of all liberal political philosophers, Michael Ignatieff, defended the US war in Iraq, and used the theory of lesser evil to argue that war, torture and other evils can be used in order to get rid of the great evil of terrorism. If liberal democracy transforms into fascism, citizens of Middle Eastern origins and those practising Islam in Western countries can readily become targets of genocide or end up in concentration camps (as happened to Japanese-Canadians during WW2). Concentration camps and forced population transfers can occur even in the absence of a world war.

The current world situation is developing in a direction that smacks of more setbacks for the people of the world, for the planet and surely for socialists. Capitalism

has already divided the world into two types of human beings: those worthy of living and those worthy of dying. The megacities of the world warn us of coming disasters: a planet devastated by the forces of capitalism, with small fortresses in which the rich minority reproduces itself and its rule through sheer military force. During the last reign of fascism, in WW2, communists and socialists were the major force in the struggle for freedom, from the streets of Paris and Milan to the mountains of Greece and China. What role are the forces of the left, especially socialists, playing in the current crisis in which the conflict between reactionaries has overshadowed class and gender struggles?

I began this article with my observation about the situation in Turkey, which—like the worldwide peace marches of February 15, 2003—points in an optimistic direction. In both cases, we see the power of the people of the world to resist repression. However, the spontaneous, ruptured, scattered initiatives of social movements, no matter how powerful they may be, are not a match for the organized power of capitalism. The words of Rosa Luxemburg are more telling today than they were a century ago: "socialism or barbarism." ★

# A thirst for pop

**A**s winter has come to its end, the cumulative effect of too much TV, and, especially, too much Much, has created a thirst for pop music with a bit of substance and ambiguity. Interesting work seems to be coming from the odd corners of hiphop—Toronto's Mind Bender and K-os, USian MF Doom, and England's Dizzee Rascal, MIA, and The Streets. I've been revisiting the latter's *A Grand Don't Come For Free* (Pure Groove/Universal). This is amongst the most low key of "concept" albums—it's the guy's life over a couple of days. "It was supposed to be so easy" opens with powerful Wagnerian horns. Skinner's misadventures start with returning an empty DVD case, lining up for the bank machine which won't give him any money, his cell phone going dead, and then losing all his money which was stored in a shoebox by the TV. "Not Addicted" is about betting on soccer without knowing fuck all about it. "Blinded by the Lights" is a beautiful

trancey song about going clubbing and not finding your friends. "Wouldn't Have It Any Other Way" is "Blinded's" twin: instead of going clubbing Mike stays on the couch with his girlfriend smoking roaches.

*Taking Back the Streets: Women, Youth, and Direct Democracy* by anarchist historian Temma Kaplan is a brilliant piece of social history. Kaplan tells the story of the activities of women activists during the overthrow of the dictatorships in Chile, Argentina and Spain. The social histories are extremely complicated and involved, and I learned a lot from the basic history that Kaplan tells. Her emphasis, and where the book excels, is describing the particular contradictions that women activists played in these struggles. Some progressive women worked to break gender laws and codes, while others appealed to them. One can see this in the instance of the Argentinean Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. By acting as activists and defying the state, these women are breaking rules, but often rely on conservative ideas of the role of motherhood. The chapter I found most engrossing was the second, "Pots and Pans Will Break My Bones," which deals with the symbolism of empty pots and pans, initially used by right wing women in Chile in the coup against Salvador Allende's government and then later by anti-fascist women during the struggle against the Pinochet regime. The book is quite dense, and sometimes more detailed than a reader may wish, but it is an important contribution to the history of social movements, the successes, failures, and limits of struggles against fascism, and to the empirically grounded theorization of gender.

"pfull" by Jay Levin - from Erowid.org



Mark Connery is a child care worker and library enthusiast from Toronto. Pluggin' Away is an ongoing column of reviews in New Socialist magazine.

Ever wondered if you could snort Prozac? If mint could make you hallucinate? Ecstasy drain spinal fluid? This reviewer has found two fabulous websites based on the culture of mind-altering drugs, which can answer these questions. *Erowid*, or [www.erowid.org](http://www.erowid.org), is a non-profit online encyclopedia of mind-altering substances and techniques. Its best known features are its particular 'vaults' on varying chemicals, herbs, plants, ideas and art. It has also put online a myriad of books, essays and other documents about drugs, visionary experiences, visionary art and visionary thinkers. The other is the *New Bluelight* [www.bluelight.nu](http://www.bluelight.nu), also a non-profit, which is primarily a chat and discussion board which originated from Ecstasy & rave culture. On a very basic level these sites offer excellent harm reduction information that encourages the responsible use of intoxicants and provides information and support for people badly affected by them. *Erowid*, which has tried to stay word-of-mouth, has had some media exposure due to negative statements by "War On Drugs" reactionaries and praise by caregivers who sought honest information on little known drugs. *Bluelight* also offers an arena for informal peer to peer counseling. Most importantly these sites provide users with information about what is being imbibed and its possible psychological, physical and social effects. A more abstract, but just as admirable, dimension of these sites is they offer a practical alternative way of doing science. Due to the criminalization and hassles involved in researching non-patentable, illegal and/or otherwise difficult to commodify drugs, and the spread of communications technologies, a collective, international and participatory pool of knowledge has been built and continues to be built.

BTW, the answers to the questions above are: Yes, but you don't want to; yes, Salvia Divinorum is a potent psychedelic mint plant from the Oaxaca region of Mexico; and Ecstasy does a lot of things to a body but doesn't drain spinal fluid. ★

## BOOK REVIEW

# *Chronicling the women's movement in Canada*

**TEN THOUSAND ROSES:  
THE MAKING OF A FEMINIST  
REVOLUTION**

BY JUDY REBICK

PAPERBACK: 256 PAGES  
PUBLISHED 2005, \$24.00 CDN  
AVAILABLE FROM RABBLE.CA/BOOKS

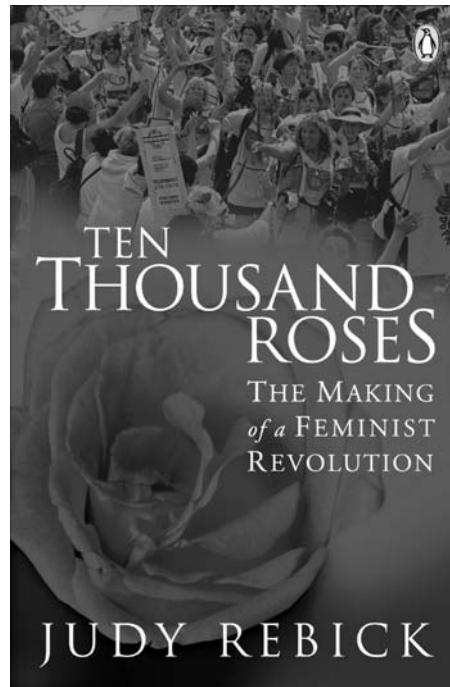
REVIEWED BY  
SANDRA SARNER

Judy Rebick's *Ten Thousand Roses* is a welcome major contribution to a chronicling of the second wave women's movement in Canada of the 1970s and 1980s. The story is told through the voices of dozens of women who played key roles in the fight for women's liberation and women's rights.

Through first hand accounts, we learn of protests, meetings, lobbying and debates. The voices of organizers help us relive the struggles, set-backs and victories as women organized for reproductive rights, for child care, against violence, against racism and war, for equal pay, job equity and union recognition.

The story of the Canadian women's movement is also the story of battles for recognition within the movement itself. Lesbians, women of colour, immigrant, native and disabled women had to challenge middle-class white women before their issues were taken up and seriously fought for. As a result, feminists have often been in the forefront of struggles around issues of racism, ableism and sexuality.

Rebick's book is extremely valuable but,



Judy Rebick

as a history of the Canadian women's movement, it is also disappointing on a number of fronts.

There is very little attempt to provide context or analysis for the stories told.

Why is it called second wave feminism? Nowhere does Rebick explain that the first wave of feminism in North America grew out of the early civil rights movement and women's struggle for the vote. Nowhere is it explained that, just as first wave feminism coincided with massive worldwide struggles for workers' rights and socialism in the early part of the 20th century, so the second wave developed as part of the general radicalization of the 60s and 70s. Some of this is implied — but not clearly drawn out.

This is one reason why *Ten Thousand Roses* will be most useful and appreciated by those who have some familiarity with the period and the struggles that Rebick is chronicling. But for those who did not live through this period, or who were not

touched by the movement itself—especially for young women today—to too much is left unaddressed.

Another example. Rebick tries to give a balance of space to women in the three main political branches of second wave feminism—liberal feminists, radical feminists and socialist feminists. But, although some sense can be gained from the stories themselves, no description is provided of the different analyses behind each perspective and their implications for the movement and the particular struggles addressed.

Different analyses lead to different strategies. Different strategies lead to different methods of organizing, different results and sometimes to gains for middle class women but not for poor and working class women. Because the book makes very little attempt at analysis, the full implications of debates within the movement can be difficult to sort out. Nor are the reasons always clear behind the successes in some areas and the set-backs or stalls in others.

More analysis could also have situated the women's movement more clearly within the general radicalization of the period. Fortunately, some of this is provided in the introductions to the sections. But the relationship is rarely drawn out within the stories of the struggles themselves.

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Sandra Sarner is an editorial associate of New Socialist magazine.

In fact, as a socialist feminist, it is surprising that Rebick has not given us more about some of the important mass mobilizations and grass-roots initiatives that were an integral part of the movement.

So, for example, we do not hear about the Canadian Union of Postal Workers' strike of the mid-70s that won the first maternity leave benefits for working women.

Nor do we get any details of the Fleck strike of the later 70s when mass mobilizations of women's organizations along with solidarity actions from rank-and-file autoworkers won a victory for women working in the autoparts industry. In early morning mobilizations, thousands of women movement and trade unionist activists, many bussed in from afar, linked arms to close down Fleck until the employer was forced to negotiate. A couple of first-hand accounts would have given readers a flavour of the optimism about grass-roots power and potential for a better world that infused the women's movement—and all the radical movements—especially in the 1970s and early 1980s.

We do get the important story of how key women activists pulled together a broad-based coalition to organize the first

PHOTO: STEELWORKERS WEBSITE



Inco wives played a leading role in the victory of the miners' Steelworkers Local 6500 in the late 1970s: as a socialist feminist, it is surprising that Rebick has not given us more on this and other grass-roots initiatives.

wildly successful International Women's Day (IWD) march in Toronto in 1978. But we don't hear the incredible story of the Inco miners' wives who led the march. This

group of women went through remarkable personal and political transformations as a result of the support work they did during the 9-month-long strike by Sudbury miners in United Steelworkers Local 6500.

Politically inexperienced housewives became militant feminists in the course of their work building support for the strike. They went from raising money locally and hosting pot-luck suppers in the early weeks to taking over picketing in the face of injunctions against the strikers and travelling across the country, speaking publicly and building solidarity as the strike dragged on. In the end, the strike ended in a victory for the Steelworkers, with no small credit due to the women.

Despite these criticism, *Ten Thousand Roses* is a valuable resource. Rebick has done a good job of including voices from across the country and across a wide range of issues. By dividing the book by decade and devoting individual chapters to particular issues, the book is a handy reference. And although it leaves many questions unanswered—perhaps most importantly, the question of how feminists today can continue the struggle—it celebrates the many victories of a generation of women activists and documents the rich tapestry of second wave feminism in Canada. ★

## MAIN BRANCHES OF FEMINISM: A THUMBNAIL SKETCH

**LIBERAL FEMINISTS.** Those who work for change within the existing system. Liberal feminists are fighting for equality with men under capitalism — for better representation of women in parliament, for more women in key leadership roles in society, for equal pay, equal access to jobs, equality under the law, etc. Liberal feminists tend to concentrate on legal and parliamentary change and generally favour lobbying over mobilization. Their struggle is for women's rights.

**RADICAL FEMINISTS.** Those who see the main division in society as that between women and men and the main problem as being the patriarchal system which gives men power over women. Radical feminists tend to favour women-only mobilizing as they see men as the enemy. Many radical feminists were active in the anti-pornography movement and in issues around violence against women. Most radical feminists envisioned their struggle as one for full liberation for women.

**SOCIALIST FEMINISTS.** Those who are fighting for a revolutionary transformation of society and who see the problem as some combination of patriarchy or male power and capitalism. Socialist feminists favour grass-roots organizing, mass mobilization and the building of solidarity between feminists and other oppressed and exploited sectors of society, including organized workers. The ultimate goal of socialist feminists goes beyond women's rights to women's liberation, and ultimately, human liberation.

## BOOK REVIEW

# Made for revolution

**THE PROPHET ARMED: TROTSKY, 1879-1921, 497 PP**

**THE PROPHET UNARMED:**

**TROTSKY, 1921-1929, 444 PP**

**THE PROPHET OUTCAST:**

**TROTSKY, 1929-1940, 512 PP**

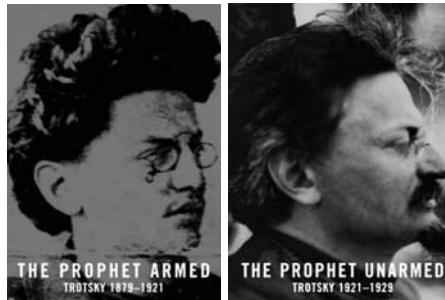
BY ISAAC DEUTSCHER

PUBLISHED BY VERSO

REVIEWED BY DALE SHIN

**O**n any reckoning, Leon Trotsky has strong claims to be considered the greatest revolutionary of the previous century. Early critic and later comrade-in-arms of V. I. Lenin, whose Bolshevik Party in October 1917 spearheaded history's first socialist revolution; founder of the Red Army that won the ensuing civil war; courageous witness to the subsequent degeneration of that revolution into a police raid, under the heel of Joseph Stalin, the despot who succeeded Lenin as leader of the Bolsheviks, and whose name became synonymous with the totalitarian rule he exercised—here is the profile of one of the outstanding Marxists of his generation, of whom the Polish socialist-historian Isaac Deutscher, in his authoritative biography of Trotsky, wrote that he was “made for revolution.”

Originally published under the shadow of the Cold War, Deutscher's classic work helped to reacquaint readers on both sides of the Atlantic with its subject's prolific life and influence, at a time when “Trotskyism” was a popular term of ridicule in left-wing circles—in the main due to the malicious slanders propagated by Moscow's paid intellectual publicists, as well as the petty sectarian feuding and obsessive hairsplitting amongst Trotsky's self-styled adherents. Deutscher's monumental study, with each volume chronicling a different chapter of Trotsky's saga—from his role in the



October uprising and civil war, through his leadership of the ill-starred Left Opposition to Stalin, to his exile from the USSR and eventual assassination at the hands of a Soviet agent—sought to redeem his rich (if uneven) legacy; but also to recall the democratic ideals that had animated the Russian Revolution in its early years, before the Stalinist counter-revolution buried them, along with the women and men who fought against their perversion. More than a decade after the collapse of “Communism,” Verso has reissued Deutscher's magisterial trilogy so as to remove anew the amnesia, and anathema, that continue to surround Leon Trotsky and the revolution he was made for.

### THIRD EYE OPEN

Deutscher borrowed the title of his work from Nicolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, where, in a passage reproduced as an epigraph to *The Prophet Armed*, Machiavelli notoriously argues that “all armed prophets have conquered, and the unarmed ones have been destroyed.” By “prophet,” the Italian philosopher meant an innovator possessed of visionary imagination and ambition, not an actual clairvoyant. The dual sense of the term, however, suits the Russian revolutionary, who was equipped with “a sixth sense, as it were, an intuitive sense of history, which singled him out among the political thinkers of his generation, sometimes exposed him almost to derision, but more often found triumphant, if delayed, vindication.” Thus, while most Marxists before 1917 believed that the impending Russian Revolution would overthrow the then-

ruling monarchy and install a representative democracy, thereby launching the development of liberal capitalism in Russia—which in turn would set the scene for a socialist epilogue to this ‘bourgeois’ revolution, albeit at an unspecifiable future date—Trotsky acutely foresaw that the coming upheaval would not exhaust itself with these limited goals, but would culminate in gyrations aiming at the immediate abolition of class rule, helmed by the relatively small, but disproportionately powerful, urban working class.

Trotsky's audacious prognosis of “permanent revolution” was to be eminently borne out by the events of 1917. His prevision was not without its limits, however. Flushed with optimism, he predicted that the Russian Revolution would incite concurrent working-class insurrections across the continent, without whose aid it would not be able to prolong itself. It never entered Trotsky's mind that Soviet Russia would be abandoned to its own meager resources by the inertia of the European labour movement. And yet, if he could not visualize this possibility, he did unwittingly summarize beforehand the usurpatory logic that was to inform the ideology and practice of the post-revolutionary state so isolated: “the party organization at first substitutes for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organization; and finally a single ‘dictator’ substitutes himself for the Central Committee.”

As *The Prophet Unarmed* shows, this schema of “substitutionism,” first silhouetted in 1904, essentially characterized the evolution of Bolshevism in government. Threatened with foreign invasion, left to fend for themselves by the Western proletariat, and drawn into a bloody civil war, the Bolsheviks promoted a self-destructive siege mentality; they closed ranks within the party, banning organized factions, and throttled dissent outside it, outlawing all oppositional groups. These were measures which Trotsky, to his discredit, enthusiastically supported, and whose pernicious precedents would later be invoked by

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Stalin to crush resistance to his growing monopoly of power—in the front rank, Trotsky himself. By a grotesque historical irony, Trotsky's arch-nemesis "struck him down with his own weapons"; and in 1929, he was banished from the republic and branded a traitor. Even in exile, however, Trotsky's restless speculative mind would not lay fallow: among other things, he forecast the rise of Hitler, warning that the short-sighted tactics imposed by Stalin and others upon German labour in the fight against Nazism were clearing a path for the Third Reich.

#### HOW STALIN GOT HIS GROOVE BACK

The exoneration, then, of a revolutionary martyr who deserved a better fate than to have his exemplary record of socialist internationalism effaced by the calumnies heaped upon it by his adversaries. But also an exculpation of the autocrat chiefly responsible for his downfall: these were Deutscher's mutually canceling accomplishments. For it is one of the principal aims of *The Prophet Armed* and its sequels to trace "the thread of unconscious historic continuity" that led from Lenin and Trotsky's shamefacedly repressive policies of the early 1920s to the atrocities perpetrated thereafter by Stalin's homicidal regime. Deutscher could thus argue that Stalinism, so far from an aberration in the course of the revolution, represented its consummation, whose most important "practical achievement," that is, a nationalized economy based on state control of industry and trade—for Deutscher as for Trotsky, the saving grace of the Soviet "workers' state," however "degenerated" otherwise—could not have been secured without resort to despotic means.

Such is the thrust of the Machiavellian flourish Deutscher mines for his commanding metaphor: after the civil war, when the Russian people, fatigued by the ravages of the preceding years, lost their ardour for the revolutionary cause, and when even some Bolsheviks, aghast at the creeping authoritarianism of the upstart state bureaucracy, were expressing belated misgivings about the direction they were headed in—Trotsky included—a new, tougher-minded, "prophet" was needed in order to shepherd and, when necessary, strong-arm the demoralized masses and divided party to their common destiny. Enter Stalin, whose lasting virtue was to have overseen, beginning in 1928, the

forcible collectivization of agriculture and modernization of industry, in spite of the massive toll in human suffering and loss of life these incurred—to which should be added the scores of political opponents he had executed or imprisoned.

To be sure, this "second revolution" (which was reproduced in the East European countries annexed to the USSR after WWII) strayed considerably from the model of working-class self-emancipation traditionally conceived by Marxists as the only viable road to socialism; it was, rather, a continuation of that "substitutionism" that had yielded Stalin's dictatorship in the first place. But those, Deutscher concluded, were the world-historical breaks. Not a revolution "from below," but one "from above and from outside" had been the order of the day, relegating the

eroding Stalinism from the inside," as the bureaucracy itself began to press for the democratic reform of Soviet society. From above, outside, and inside: history, evidently, could be made from anywhere but below. The historian, alas, lacked not only his subject's unswerving commitment to "undiluted Marxism," but also his oracular powers; "de-Stalinization" proved less the heroic prologue to a "return of classical Marxism" than a farcical prelude to the dissolution of "actually existing socialism."

#### UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES

The Prophet trilogy has been widely hailed as one of the greatest modern biographies, and it is not difficult to see why. Its protagonist, as is well-known, was himself a notably gifted writer. Peerless among his contemporaries, Trotsky's literary prowess was matched by that of his biographer. Deutscher's sinuous prose, demonstrating mastery of a language that was remarkably not his native tongue, conscripts his reader into the hothouse world of Russian revolutionary politics: one athwart with epic popular struggles, acrimonious intellectual debates, and sanguinary factional intrigues, and enlivened by a pervasive sense that an epoch was here being defined.

But it is Trotsky's indomitable revolutionary spirit, the sheer constancy of his convictions amid so many personal betrayals, disappointments, and humiliations, that impart the most durable impression of that world. Never before had the entire machinery of a state—political, ideological, military—been deployed to destroy a single individual. Yet, for all the persecutions Trotsky faced, "there was no penance in him to the end." Understandably bent (he even contemplated suicide, hoping to exchange his life for those of his children—all of whom died before him), his will remained fundamentally unbroken. A young Trotsky had pronounced "a curse... upon all those who want to bring dryness and hardness into all the relations of life"; and the seer was to persevere in his opposition to the established powers of his age—fascism, Stalinism, capitalism—up until the day an assassin struck him fatally in the head. The prophet's curse revenged itself against the first two members of that Triple Alliance; it has yet to descend upon the third, which continues to bring dryness and hardness into all our lives. But then, Trotsky only proposed the end of class society—he left it for us to dispose of it. ★



Trotsky: politics was his passion but his interest extended to all aspects of life.

"undiluted classical Marxism" upheld by Trotsky to a political anachronism; the futility of which was exemplified by his final years as The Prophet Outcast—years spent collecting cacti, raising rabbits, and refereeing the internecine disputes among his ever-fractious followers. Another paradox, however: for the very material progress over which Stalin had presided was now—in the 1960s—"disrupting and

# FILM REVIEW

# American dreams and nightmares

THE ASSASSINATION OF RICHARD NIXON

DIRECTED BY NIELS MUELLER

STARRING SEAN PENN WITH DON CHEADLE, JACK THOMPSON AND NAOMI WATTS

REVIEWED BY NEIL BRAGANZA AND KAREN RUDDY

Marx and Engels once wrote capitalism produces its own gravediggers. What they meant is capitalism creates the working class, whose poverty and experiences of dehumanization leads them to organize collectively to overthrow the very system that begets their destitution. *The Assassination of Richard Nixon* offers us the grim lesson that capitalism not only produces its own gravediggers: it also produces its own psychopaths, people who rebel against it not by joining a class struggle to transform society, but by killing themselves and innocent working people.

*The Assassination of Richard Nixon* (2004) is set against the backdrop of the Watergate scandal and is based on the true story of Samuel Bicke's (his real surname is Bycke) failed attempt in 1974 to hijack a passenger airplane and crash it into the White House. Most of the film focuses on Bicke's life the year preceding his assassination attempt, and explores how an ordinary man could be driven to commit mass murder.

## AMERICAN NIGHTMARE

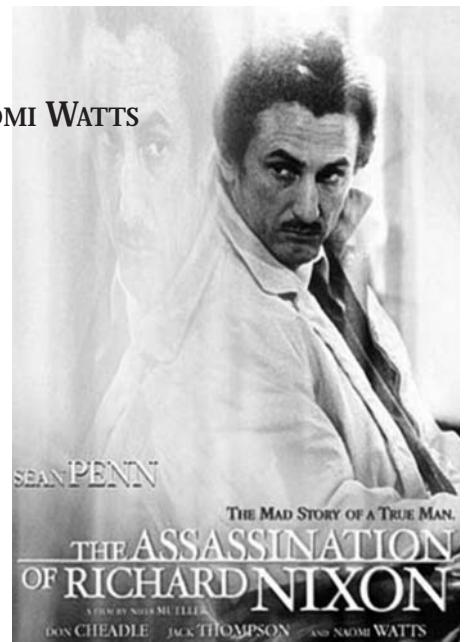
Bicke's story is all too ordinary. He is a white working man who desperately wants to live the American dream: to open his own small business with his best friend, a black mechanic; to fulfill his role as family breadwinner and thereby reunite with his kids and ex-wife; and to drive a Cadillac, the classic symbol of the American dream. Yet, he is turned down for the loan he needs to start his business; his ex-wife has

lost interest in him and is instead dating a man who really does own a Cadillac. And, last but not least, he is stuck in a job he hates.

The film portrays the tragic life of a man who knows he has failed to live up to his own standard of manhood, but who must nevertheless sell himself as a successful man. Bicke works at a family-owned office furniture store that only hires married men. To keep his job and win the recognition of his boss, he must pretend he's married. And, to win back his wife, he must demonstrate to her that he's a successful salesman. Trapped in this vicious circle, Bicke is forced to live a life of lies and deceit that he finds morally reprehensible.

As a salesman Bicke must exude a confidence and assertiveness he lacks. His workplace, like countless others under capitalism, is structured to produce feelings of insecurity and alienation. Bicke's boss tries to teach him how to be a successful salesman, but does so by playing on Bicke's insecurities. Not only must Bicke compete with co-workers for recognition, his boss also intimidates him into lying to and manipulating others. The greater the boss's efforts, the more Bicke loses confidence, and the poorer a salesman he becomes. Bicke ends up despising his boss, his job and himself. He realizes that to be successful he must degrade himself and his customers by deceiving them, and subordinate himself to his boss and the rules of his workplace. His success could only come at the price of his emasculation.

Bicke's hatred for his boss and job gets



attached to the image of Richard Nixon, who his boss identifies as the "greatest salesman of all." While the Watergate scandal isn't explicitly depicted in the film, almost every scene contains a television that is tuned into the inquiry. Audiences and characters are constantly subjected to Nixon's endless speeches in which he blames the social and economic crisis of the early 1970s on the failure of individuals to believe strongly enough in the American dream. Throughout the film, Nixon's voice eerily blends with the voice on the self-help tape Bicke's boss gives him to improve his sales technique. The two messages are identical: anyone can become successful simply by believing in the reality one wishes existed. In other words, the American dream can be yours if you want it badly enough.

Bicke's inability to piece together a respectable life for himself and his family gives the lie to the American dream, showing it to be the illusion that many working women and people of colour always knew it to be. While it may have been realizable for the white men of an earlier generation, who reaped many of the benefits of what is now commonly referred to as the post-WWII "boom," after the recession and oil shocks of 1973, that

Neil Braganza and Karen Ruddy are members of CUPE 3903 at York University. Neil is also a member of the New Socialist Group. This review is the product of a post-film discussion between the authors and Clarice Kuhling and Alex Levant.

*In the absence of any mass radical movement that could provide him with a sense of collective struggle and an outlet for his frustration and despair, he ends up turning his anger inward until he can no longer psychically cope with the reality that he will never live the American dream.*

economic security began to disappear. Bicke is part of that group of white American men who in the 1970s saw the American dream—and its promise of prosperity and happiness for anyone who is honest and hard-working—crumble before their very eyes.

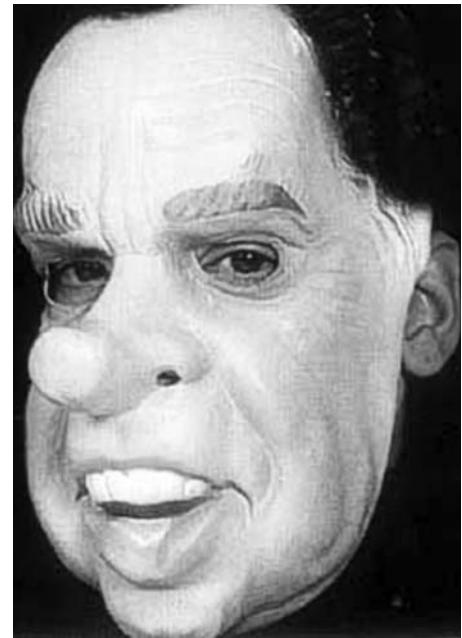
The film captures the ambivalence of Bicke's situation.

On the one hand, as a white man, he enjoys the privileges of post-war capitalism, and still believes deeply in the American dream. He continues to think he can escape insecurity and exploitation without escaping capitalism. For instance, when Bicke applies for a loan, he tries to sell the loans officer a vision of a new way to do business in America. Rather than manipulate his customers, he pledges, he will be upfront with them about how much profit he is making from his sales. But, as the loans officer cynically points out, being honest about how much profit you're making doesn't change the fact that you're making a profit. This scene reveals the absurdity of seeing capitalism as simply a moral problem that could be solved if business owners were only more honest with their workers and customers.

On the other hand, Bicke's hatred for a society that continuously degrades people

and feeds on their insecurity by offering them an unrealizable dream, and his own sense of alienation and disenchantment at work, leads him to identify with the oppressive experiences of women and people of colour. Bicke desperately searches for ways to organize with others to address systemic exploitation and oppression. Yet, his lack of knowledge of the history of struggles against racism and sexism leads him to be patronizing towards those he wishes to convert to his cause. In one scene, he tries to convince the Black Panthers to change their name to the "Zebras" so their movement can better reflect what he sees as the common struggles of whites and blacks. In his personal life, Bicke's ex-wife and his best friend resent being told that they are being duped by an oppressive system when they have to put up with sexism and racism at work everyday in order to make a living.

Bicke is enraged by the dehumanization he sees around him, and this rage could have served as a basis for his politicization. But in the absence of any mass radical movement that could provide him with a sense of collective struggle and an outlet for his frustration and despair, he ends up turning his anger inward until he can no longer psychically cope with the reality that he will never live the American dream.



In the final month of his life, Bicke is alone and depressed. He decides that the only way to right the wrongs of his situation is to assassinate Nixon. He feels some remorse that his assassination attempt will involve taking the lives of innocent people, but he convinces himself that he will be redeeming all of humankind. On the tape he sends to his favorite composer, Leonard Bernstein, which outlines his plans, Bicke describes himself as a grain of sand lost on a huge beach—a grain that will shed its anonymity by rising up and changing the world. Indeed, by killing Nixon, Bicke believes he could finally realize the dream that it is possible for individuals to transform their situations by virtue of their sheer willpower. He will push this impossible dream to its logical conclusion by becoming the one individual to rise above all others in the name of ending manipulation and corruption.

In the end, Bicke's assassination attempt fails miserably. After he kills one pilot, shoots a number of passengers, and holds one airline worker hostage, he takes his own life. It would be easy to feel sorry for Bicke, since his plight as a working man is so similar to that of many people under capitalism. It would also be easy to romanticize him as a hero who, despite his failures, wants to destroy one of the key symbols of American capitalism: the White House. But the fact that Bicke understood his actions to be those of the individual hero so celebrated by Nixon's American dream should give us pause. ★



Capitalism  
not only  
produces its  
own  
gravediggers:  
it also  
produces its  
own  
psychopaths.

# OBITUARY: TORVALD (TOM) PATTERSON (1964-2005)

## *'All the dreams we had, I will carry on.'*

The following is an excerpt from PETER DRUCKER's obituary for Torvald Patterson, who joined the New Socialist Group shortly after it was founded in 1996.

To read other obituaries and memories of Torvald from far and wide, please visit [www.newsocialist.org/torvald](http://www.newsocialist.org/torvald)

Torvald had long and close ties to the Fourth International's school, which he and I attended for the first time in the fall of 1987. The school was a place not just to learn facts or theories (though Torvald was great at absorbing facts and theories) but also to reexamine our politics and understanding of the world in a critical-minded way. Torvald and I loved it.

Torvald has been one of the few comrades from English Canada we've had at the school in the past 15 years. He came several times as an interpreter—a gifted and enthusiastic one. His love for languages, including sign language, was an expression of his strong desire to communicate across boundaries. He was willing to work at it too, despite being paralyzed by bouts of depression, which got in the way of formal education or training. He was never just an interpreter of course; in the corridors and late at night he was often in the thick of political discussions. He devoted himself to participants' practical education as well—if there were any cute guys among them, Torvald was not the man to leave their sexuality untested.

Torvald participated (both as an interpreter and speaker from the floor) in the FI's most recent World Congress in 2003, where a long resolution on lesbian/gay liberation was adopted. It was always a struggle for him to get money together to

pay for his trips. He rarely had a steady job, and at the end was surviving on the laughable income that an "advanced" capitalist state considers appropriate for someone with a disability. These difficulties prevented him from attending the first LGBT Strategy Seminar in 1998. However, he helped with the follow-up to the 2000 and 2002 seminars, particularly by managing a couple of queer left email lists. He'll be missed on the net as well as in person; that was another way he helped people communicate across boundaries.

Queer politics was Torvald's first and foremost political love. The Vancouver branch of Socialist Challenge, as I met it through Torvald in the late 1980s, was the only branch of the FI I know of anywhere in the world ever to be made up of a majority of gay men, organically connected to and playing a leading role in a local gay community. Though I never lived in Vancouver, I felt at home with those comrades in a way that it's hard for a lesbian/gay person to feel fully at home in most Marxist organizations.

I always admired Torvald for intransigently sticking to the ideals of gay liberation in his own life. In hindsight I think that in the first years I knew him, when I was head-over-heels in love with him, I idealized his sex life too much. He gave a lot of sweetness and love to his sexual partners, and thanks to him I got glimpses in these last years of the warmth and affection



STEPHEN PEARCE

that exists in the leather community, which is not something an outsider necessarily expects. But besides the difficulties in his relationships that his depression caused, there were forms of alienation there characteristic of the surrounding capitalist society. Torvald never became middle-aged; I can't imagine he would have, not at heart, however long he lived. The example of his life has helped me keep on trying to sustain a queer revolutionary socialist feminist politics against the odds. I hope his memory will help sustain me in the future.

Part of why Torvald will be so badly missed is he was always happy to explain in detail the realities of Canadian society to comrades from other countries—and there are a lot of complicated details in the Marxist analysis of this medium-sized imperialist country of yours, especially for foreigners, who don't pay all that much attention to it—but also to explain what it means being queer, or living with depression, or living with HIV/AIDS, or being into S/M, or working in the sex trade. Even revolutionary socialists were not always happy or comfortable with what Torvald had to say, not that he ever claimed to have the last word on anything. All the more reason for us to keep the discussions going and keep pushing back the frontiers of our sexual politics, even now that he's gone.★

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Peter Drucker is a socialist in the Netherlands. The title of this article is from "For a Friend," by Jimmy Somerville, a song Torvald loved.

# 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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The situation in Bolivia remains volatile. See Jeffrey Webber's article on page 8, and watch for his frequent updates at [newsocialist.org](http://newsocialist.org)

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# Friendly Fire

by Alan Sears

## *U.S. Friendly Fire Kills 8 Iraqis*

friends like these who  
need enemies

can't tell the enemies from  
the friends here  
all look the same, speak the same language (whatever it is)  
Hands UP! You've seen the movie  
Don't pretend you don't  
speak English

I'm talkin' to you, LOUD  
the universal tongue  
what part of m-i-c-k-e-y m-o-u-s-e  
don't you understand?  
I SAID  
(Captain, we've got a situation here)

friendly fire  
Stop! In the name of love  
before we break you  
error is  
terrorists  
and the remnants of the old regime

U.S. soldiers opened fire  
on uniformed Iraqi policemen chasing

you assessed old oil wars opted for  
a new one a formidable attack politics meant chasing  
Hussein again  
sins of the father who pulled out too soon  
consummate the act  
occupy Iraq

it burns burns burns  
that friendly fire  
the name of every Iraqi who dies  
burnt into the memory

slow burn  
blow back  
no truth  
storm troops  
desert storm  
fire storm

lots of fire  
but no smoking gun  
you gotta believe in the weapons of mass destruction  
still got the receipt  
filed under  
old friends, old friends sat in their dark trench like dead ends

thanks for the memories  
reverberations through generations  
rubble trouble  
we came we saw  
we contracted out  
Bechtel WorldCom Haliburton Creative Associates

with friends like these  
who needs

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