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CAPITALISM,
VIOLENCE...



...AND WOMEN'S LIVES



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**SRI LANKA AFTER TSUNAMI
CLC CONVENTION**

EDITORIAL

Militarism, security panic & racism

The official response to the bombings that killed civilians in London on July 7 was swift and nauseatingly hypocritical.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, joined by George Bush, Paul Martin and other leaders gathered in Scotland for the G-8 summit, prattled on about ‘good’ versus ‘evil’ and the need to defend ‘civilization’ against the terrorist threat.

The “war on terror” has been sputtering as the US-led occupation of Iraq produces an ongoing spiral of violence. It has manifestly not made the world a safer and more secure place. This is clear even to analysts who are far from left-wingers: a recent report by the British think-tank Chatham House pointed out that the invasion and occupation of Iraq “gave a boost to the al-Qaeda network’s propaganda, recruitment and fundraising” and that “the UK is at particular risk because it is the closest ally of the United States.” In spite of all of Blair’s efforts to deny it, many people in Britain see that there is a link between their government’s involvement in Iraq and the bombings in London.

The London bombings were actually a political gift for Bush, Blair and co. They were immediately used to justify a new offensive by many Western governments, including Canada’s. The message is warlike. Leaders promise no retreat from the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Canada will do its bit, with the first wave of some 2000 troops dispatched to Kandahar in Afghanistan, where they will likely see combat. General Hillier, Chief of Defence Staff, echoed the Bush line about an enemy that hates “our freedoms” and crowed “We are the Canadian Forces and our job is to be able to kill people.” Jack Layton’s response showed how deep the NDP leadership’s opposition to militarism runs: “We have a very committed, level-headed head of our armed forces who isn’t afraid to express the passion that underlies the mission that front-line personnel are going to be taking on.”

Along with the renewed commitment of Western states to the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan has been another wave of “national security” hype and intensified nationalist racism against Muslims and people of colour.

In Canada, Federal Minister of Transportation Lapierre is talking about a “no-fly” list that will ban people from air transport and expanding video surveillance on public transit. The media has been full of talk about what Muslims must do. Implicitly or explicitly, all Muslims are being held responsible for the actions of handfuls of terrorists – a clear example of racist scapegoating. While opinion poll questions are often loaded to manipulate the results, it is worrying that a large minority favours reducing Muslim immigration.

The activist group No One Is Illegal – Vancouver sums up the situation we’re in: “Upgraded security measures in the post 9/11 climate have led to an increase of racial profiling and invasion of

privacy rights. Within weeks of 9/11, Canada implemented a wide array of laws and practices in the areas of criminal law, immigration law, tax law, employment, intelligence services and airport security. Further Orwellian measures, such as the increased use of cameras in subways and trains proposed by LaPierre, will have a devastating effect on the right to privacy in public spaces and, despite government assurances, will have a disproportionate impact on people of colour.

A number of efforts to boost the military’s image are also underway. The August 13 military funeral service for the last Canadian holder of the Victoria Cross was the biggest in half a century.

Militarism, security panic and racism all help Bush, Blair and Martin to deflect attention from the glaring truth: imperial occupations and Western-backed Israeli actions against the Palestinians have led to great suffering in the Middle East and a sense of humiliation across the Muslim world.

War and state terrorism in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine are generating predictable consequences, including terrorist attacks by small groups who target civilians, including people in the imperialist countries.

“Terrorism” is a greatly abused word which today is often used to demonize national liberation struggles, demonstrations and other forms of protest. But the London bombings were terrorist in the real sense.

New Socialist opposes terrorism. Killing innocent civilians – in London, a multiracial and largely working-class group of commuters – is simply unjustifiable.

New Socialist opposes terrorist attacks regardless of the ideology of the terrorists. In the case of the London bombings, those behind them were not misguided left-wingers but reactionary religious fundamentalists. As the British paper *Socialist Resistance* said in its statement after the bombings, they “have nothing to offer the working class of the Arab world or working-class Muslims in Britain...They are incapable of distinguishing between the British government and the tens of millions of people in this country who are against the war.”

Terrorism doesn’t help the struggle against war and occupation. The London bombings hurt efforts to build movements, just as the 9/11 attacks were a major blow to the global justice movement, especially in the US and Canada. Sowing mass fear by attacks on civilians has predictable consequences. It leads to state repression and the rise of racism.

In response, it is vital to strengthen organizing against war, occupation and racism in Canada as part of the global movements that declare “Another World is Possible.” It is these that offer an alternative to the forces of Bush and Bin-Laden. We urge readers to respond to the Canadian Peace Alliance’s call for demonstrations on Sept. 24. ★

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Vote stacked, incumbent wins

ALEX LEVANT reports on the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) Convention in Montreal (June 13-17). Alex attended as a delegate from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3903 which represents 2400 educational workers at York University in Toronto.

The most interesting event was the election for President – the first in 15 years. The incumbent Ken Georgetti beat challenger Carol Wall with 1084 to 643 votes (62 percent to 37 percent). However, it was Wall and her supporters – mostly public sector workers from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), CUPE, the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), some Steelworkers (USWA), and many others – who were celebrating, while the winner appeared sullen and defeated. Why? Because the vote was stacked: the incumbent had the support of virtually the whole labour establishment, which ensured his re-election.

In practice, this “support” meant the following: the CLC’s 20-member Executive Committee selected Georgetti to head the slate of the establishment, which included Secretary-Treasurer Hassan Yusseff and Executive Vice-Presidents Barb Byers and Marie Clark Walker (all incumbents whose positions were not contested); the leaders of all the largest unions (with the notable exception of CUPW’s Deborah Borque) instructed ‘their’ delegates to vote for the incumbent; several major unions, including the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), Steelworkers, Hotel and Restaurant Employees (HERE) and the Union of Needle Trades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), went so far as to exclude Wall from addressing their caucuses; the challenger was never permitted to address the convention (instead she shuttled to all the various evening caucuses and forums to have the chance to speak to delegates), while the incumbent presided over the whole convention.

Alex Levant is a member of the Toronto branch of the New Socialist Group.

Under these circumstances, all Georgetti had to do to win was breathe. While not technically an election victory, Carol Wall’s 37 percent – the highest recorded percentage against a CLC incumbent – represents a crushing defeat for Georgetti. The word at convention following the election results was that Georgetti’s days were numbered and that he would not serve out his full term in office.

The fact that so many delegates voted for the challenger, despite pressure to support the incumbent, also reveals the amount of discontent among delegates toward the labour establishment.

While conventions are a key arena for union reform, the impetus for change will come from the way we engage in workplace struggle.

Delegates’ frustration with the CLC brass is entirely understandable. It is no secret that our labour movement is losing ground. Since the mid-1980s, the percentage of unionized workers has dropped from 40 percent to 30 percent and from almost 30 percent to only 18 percent in the private sector. Public sector density has remained steady, but governments now routinely break strikes using back-to-work legislation. We are working longer hours with less job security, and our social services continue to be cut and privatized.

The CLC’s response to these grave problems has been timid and largely ineffective. There were many good resolutions passed at this convention, but the

convention was weak on how to actualize them. The CLC has focused almost entirely on lobbying governments rather than mobilizing its members, and this essentially dead-end strategy continues to guide its work. Its “Action Plan”, which was unveiled on the final day of convention when many delegates had already left, clearly demonstrates what type of action it intends to pursue:

“These actions will include advocacy and lobbying; education and training of activists, labour councils, staff and affiliates; political action and campaigns; local actions such as demonstrations and rallies; coalition building; communications and media campaigns; and international solidarity actions.”

What is particularly disturbing about this “action plan” is that it does not mention even once the one action that is the greatest strength of the labour movement: strike action. Given this strategy, it is no wonder that many of the 3.2 million workers represented by the CLC do not even know that they are members, or what the CLC even is.

Despite this sorry state of the labour movement, Georgetti campaigned on his record of “results”, and urged delegates to focus on the positive. The election results, however, demonstrate that a significant number of union officials (a layer comprised largely of local executive officers) are not falling for it. Consequently, there is space for opposition to the labour establishment within the labour movement.

The main organized opposition came from the Action Caucus. My experience with the Action Caucus has been at several CUPE conventions, where they have created a space for progressive delegates to come together and strategize around various issues, including getting important resolutions passed. At this convention, however, the Action Caucus was entirely absorbed by Wall’s election campaign.

While this is an important objective, it also has its limits. Wall is certainly far more progressive than Georgetti, and

She comes to do good
and she'll stay to do better - for workers!

Carol Wall

for clc president



would inject some desperately-needed life into the labour establishment. Her achievements are impressive – former CLC Vice-President representing workers of colour, national negotiator for PSAC, Communications, Energy and Paperworkers' Union's (CEP) first Human Rights Director, and the list goes on. She also understands that the CLC must shift its focus from lobbying to mobilizing:

"I believe that the single-minded focus on back room lobbying has been to our detriment. Lobbying government is important but we need to mobilize our members if we want to be a force for change in society."

In some ways, this election was a near coup, which put Wall in a strong position to run for President again at the next convention in 2008. However, it is unclear how she would be able to actualize these objectives.

While Wall correctly states that many of the CLC brass "came to do good, but stayed to do well", unfortunately, the problems of the labour movement are deeper than bad leadership. The current form of the labour movement (since the "postwar compromise" of 1945-48) establishes a whole layer of union officials whose interests differ from the majority of union members. While rank-and-file members make a living from their places of work, and directly benefit from the collective agreements they manage to win, the top union officials make their living from the union itself. Consequently, they do not experience attacks on workers in the same way as rank-and-file members, and have a special interest in maintaining the union institution in its current form.

In his recent analysis of the Hospital Employees Union (HEU) strike in 2004, David Camfield explains this phenomenon as follows:

"The union institution provides officials with their livelihood... For officials to keep on being officials, the union

institution must be preserved... It is because the labour officialdom is a bureaucratic social layer of a particular kind that it tends to support social democratic politics... In contrast, strikes and other forms of mass direct action that fall outside labour law's narrow definition of a legal strike bring with them the risk of huge fines or other serious damage to union institutions. Officials generally try to preserve good bargaining relationships with employers, which militancy can hurt."

Consequently, electing progressive leaders like Wall, on its own, would not suffice to transform the labour movement into an effective fighting force for working people. This effort can only work as part of a broader strategy that is oriented on transforming the relationship between the leadership and the rank-and-file, which requires considerable structural reform.

One attempt to create a space where such issues could be raised came from the Workers' Solidarity and Union Democracy Coalition, which organized two evening forums at convention. The first forum, titled "Stop Concessions, Restore Union Democracy," featured union activists such as Bruce Allen (CAW) and Gretchen Dulmage (HEU), as well as the National Executive Director of the Union des Forces Progressistes (UFP) Gordon Lefebvre, and a cameo appearance by Carol Wall. This was an opportunity for union activists to share their experiences of workplace struggles from the perspective of rank-and-file members and local leaderships. The second forum was called "Resisting War, Occupation and Imperialism." It featured speakers on Iraq, Haiti, Palestine and Canadian complicity with militarism. It focused largely on making the links between these various struggles and the labour movement.

These forums provided one of the only spaces at the CLC convention where

deeper problems than which leader to vote for could be discussed. However, attendance was sparse as this initiative came from far outside the labour establishment, and was not featured in all the glossy pamphlets and programs that were distributed to delegates. Moreover, while the Workers' Solidarity and Union Democracy Coalition is a terrific initiative, it remains on the fringe of the fringe of the labour movement.

Overall, this convention demonstrated not only the weakness of the labour establishment, but also the weakness of the opposition. While there is certainly disaffection with the current direction of the CLC, the opposition was not able to effectively channel that disaffection into any immediate results. However, it did take some steps in that direction. Carol Wall's electoral showing put the future of Georgetti's hold on the CLC in doubt. Her campaign also brought together a number of progressive activists from various unions into contact with one another. The forums put on by the Workers' Solidarity and Union Democracy Coalition broadened the scope of debate even if for a few dozen delegates. Opposition delegates at the next convention in 2008 will be able to build on these achievements.

However, if the opposition is to have a more significant impact – if it is serious about shifting the focus from lobbying governments to mobilizing members – it will have to find ways of organizing itself in a manner that includes progressive delegates in a formation that not only puts forward better candidates for the leadership of the CLC, but also forces structural reform onto the agenda in order to democratize the labour movement.

But we must also think beyond conventions. While conventions are a key arena for union reform, which should not be neglected, the impetus for change will come from the way we engage in workplace struggles. ★

ABORIGINAL SELF-DETERMINATION

The legacy of residential schools

BY NICOLE DZUBA

The history of the residential school system in Canada offers an appalling picture of the brutality and force that was used during the establishment and development of the Canadian state. Residential schools for Aboriginal youth existed for over a century under the administration and control of the Canadian government. While the last federally run residential school closed in 1996, the struggle for redress continues among the estimated 86,000 former students still alive today.

Residential schools were established in the late 19th century by the federal government, in partnership with church organizations, to overcome some of the economic and political challenges inherent in its colonial project. It became clear to the newly formed state that Aboriginal peoples were not interested in giving up their political power and their right to self-determination. Such Aboriginal resistance was incompatible with the state vision of a stable and homogeneous Canadian society and was viewed as a threat to the political and economic development of the country.

In an attempt to secure the colonial agenda and to reduce further risk and expense, the Canadian government assumed a policy of assimilation and adopted a paternalistic role in state relations with Aboriginal peoples. Central to this new policy was a strategy of assimilation through education. It was envisioned that “by placing the Indian within a circle of civilization,” the socializing power of education would replace one culture by another and the development of industrial society would not be stunted or threatened by the ‘uncivilized.’ This sentiment was made clear by the minister of Indian Affairs, Frank Oliver, in 1908 when he

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Thomas Moore, before and after his tenure at the Regina Indian Industrial School (1874) (photo from www.afn.ca)

predicted that education would “elevate the Indian from his condition of savagery” and “make him a self-supporting member of the state, and eventually a citizen in good standing.”

This strategy was implemented in partnership with the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches that had been operating missionary schools throughout the territory since as early as the 1820s. The partnership made sense, given the economic feasibility of accessing existing church infrastructure and the influential role played by churches during that period. For the duration of the partnership, the churches retained the role of operating the schools, while all other aspects of Aboriginal education became controlled by, and the responsibility of, the federal government.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL ABUSE

By 1879 the Department of Indian Affairs had adopted its most devastating version of ‘Indian’ education policy with its commitment to the development of residential schools. They were premised on the notion that adults were lost to civilization and consequently impossible to assimilate. If there was to be any hope for civilizing the ‘Indians,’ it would be necessary to remove children from their homes and place them in large educa-

tional institutions that were isolated from the cultural influences of their family and community.

130 such schools were built and operated throughout the provinces, except for Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Parents’ resistance to giving up their children was met with amendments to the *Indian Act* making attendance mandatory and thus legalizing the more violent recruitment tactic of forcibly removing children from their homes.

Persistent federal under-funding of the schools meant that the teachers and administrators who were shipped off to remote regions were in many cases unqualified as educators and caregivers. They were immediately immersed in stressful, fatiguing and frustrating work environments that became sites of horrific abuse.

With cultural assimilation being the primary objective of the schools, the use of Native language was harshly punished. One former student told of how she was punished for speaking her language by being dragged to the front of the class by her tongue. She was forced to stand in front of her classmates, dripping with blood, after the teacher had pierced three needles through her tongue.

Insufficient funding and mismanage-

ment turned the schools into labour camps and death traps. Children were overworked to sustain the functioning of the school. Decaying structures, overcrowding and malnutrition did little to protect against outbreaks of tuberculosis and smallpox that killed large percentages of the student population.

In attempts to escape neglect, sexual abuse, beatings and strappings, many children ran away and lost their lives in the bush while trying to make it home, while others found relief through suicide.

Though reports about the crisis situation in the schools from parents, inspectors and concerned staff members are recorded to have reached the Department, the requests for relief were ignored more often than not. In many cases the churches denied allegations of abuse and defended staff members who had been accused of crimes against the children.

In moments of clarity when the Department was forced to acknowledge their failing efforts, some feeble attempts were made to increase funding and improve the conditions of the schools. Nevertheless, the improvement in the quality of student life was insignificant.

APOLOGIES, REDRESS AND HEALING

Though the schools now cease to exist, their legacy continues to shape the lives of thousands of people. The federal agenda of assimilation failed, instead leading to the marginalization of entire peoples, brutally disrupting and interfering with all aspects of Aboriginal self-determination. The years of fear, loneliness and instruction in self-loathing have led to cultural loss, anxiety over identity and family breakdown. The impacts of mental, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of church officials continue to plague survivors and their communities today.

The struggle for redress for abuses suffered in the residential school system began to take form in the 1990s when former students began to launch legal claims against the government of Canada and the churches. By 1992 most of the churches had apologized and made commitments to work toward reconciliation, yet in an attempt to avoid compensation claims, some offered only “confessions.”

The federal government initially

refused to issue an apology and also denied Aboriginal demands for a public inquiry. It was not until 1998 after significant pressure and the release of the report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples that the Canadian government issued a Statement of Reconciliation that included a partial apology to those who had suffered physical and sexual abuse in the schools.

The Assembly of First Nations has demanded redress in the form of state funding for the process of healing, compensation for loss of culture and language and compensation for the physical and sexual abuse suffered in the schools. An Aboriginal Healing Foundation was established in 1998 to administer various healing programs over a six-year period. However, it has been reported that hundreds of former students have been turned away after

Though individual compensation is necessary, it is not sufficient to address the systemic racism and oppression imposed on self-determining peoples.

funding shortages caused a number of programs to dissolve.

Claims are also being heard in the courts and an Alternative Dispute Resolution process (ADR) was established by the federal government with the supposed intention of making the compensation process faster, less costly and less stressful for former students. In practice, however, the process has remained extremely slow and has generated huge and costly bureaucracies that serve to intimidate and demoralize former students. A federally proposed plan to spend \$3 million a year on private investigators to “confirm” cases of abuse adds further insult and frustration for those who seek redress.

ABORIGINAL SELF-DETERMINATION

What seems to be the most significant limitation to these forms of compensation is that they have the potential to obscure the political debate. Both the litigation and the ADR process define the issue of redress solely in terms of individ-

ualized compensation for abuse and they place the responsibility for initiating claims onto the shoulders of each individual former student. Though individual compensation is necessary, it is not sufficient to address the systemic racism and oppression imposed on self-determining peoples. Similarly, though federal funding of healing is necessary, such commitments should not be allowed to monopolize discussion and derail the larger issue of the right to self-determination.

Movements from below calling for such redress have the potential to gain momentum as Aboriginal peoples in the former British colonies unite around a shared experience of colonization and residential school abuses. This year, residential school survivors and supporters organized a National Day of Healing and Reconciliation including walks to provincial legislatures and the national parlia-

ment on May 26th.

In Manitoba, the unity walk began in Fox Lake Cree Nation and grew to as many as 600 as they made their way south to the Manitoba Legislature. This coincided with Australia's National Sorry Day commemorating the government's role in removing Aboriginal children from their families. Such initiatives shed light on residential schools in the context of the colonial project and support the larger struggle for self-determination.

While this struggle continues another assault on the right to Aboriginal education has begun. Recently, the federal government announced a plan to tax education allowances and scholarships provided to status Indians. This and the struggle to maintain the provincial tuition freeze brought 1500 Winnipeg students out to a Day of Action at the University of Manitoba campus on February 2nd of this year. Such vigilance and solidarity will be necessary as the logic of the nation-state launches its next attack. ★

Where is the NDP Going?

BY HAROLD LAVENDER

During the New Democratic Party's (NDP) past years of stagnation some anticipated it would fade into oblivion or warned the NDP needed to turn to the left or die.

However, quite the opposite has happened. The NDP has turned to the right (somewhat ambiguously federally but quite starkly in BC) and this spring demonstrated that it remained a presence on the political scene from Ottawa to British Columbia (where it doubled its share of the popular vote to 42 percent in May's election).

What does the continuing presence of the NDP tell us about the state of electoral politics in the Canadian state and, more broadly speaking, the current level of class struggle and relationship of class forces?

These questions are not pressing to immediate struggles, although a strengthened NDP could have more capacity to contain and channel broad-based struggle. Nor is it relevant to the radical anti-capitalist milieu whose issues and struggles are very different.

However, if we are oriented to what is going on in the political culture at large, the evolution of the NDP poses an ongoing question and problem.

It is easy enough to say no to the NDP and write off supporting it as a dead end. But unless the NDP leadership is challenged by credible alternatives it can continue its present course largely unscathed. How can alternatives embodying a real Left Turn be developed over time?

THE TWO FACES OF JACK LAYTON

Jack Layton has brought a new and more stylish brand of leadership to the

Harold Lavender is an editor of New Socialist and a member of the New Socialist Group in Vancouver.

NDP. But does style equal substance?

Many wished to believe or were misled into believing that Layton represented a welcome turn to the left. Others were far more skeptical.

The issue is not fully resolved but signs such as 'the NDP federal budget' suggest that the party is clearly not moving to the left. Instead the NDP is, perhaps with more skill than in the recent past, aiming in opportunist ways to become a bigger player in shaping events.

The federal NDP has dropped all talk of becoming a government in favour of electing more NDP Members of Parliament (MPs) in Ottawa. This perspective would enhance the NDP's bargaining power especially in minority government situations. The recent federal budget is a prime example. The NDP in effect became a parliamentary pressure group, slightly shifting the Liberal's agenda in exchange for supporting the budget.

The old rhetoric wasn't very credible. But is the new approach an improvement?

The NDP doesn't pose a sharp enough alternative and the level of class polarization and struggle is far too muted to challenge the Liberals for government.

More particularly the NDP's horizons have always been limited by its insensitivity to Quebec's national aspirations and its consequent lack of any presence in Quebec. Initially Layton showed signs of wanting to change this but soon got very cold feet. Instead the NDP reverted to its focus on a strong central government in Ottawa. NDP MPs and provincial premiers have joined in the chorus warning against the renewed separatist threat and allying with the Bloc Quebecois (BQ), despite the fact it has policies and a social base similar to the NDP.

Instead, the NDP has made a clear choice to appeal to Canadian nationalist and left liberal voters in an effort to convince voters to elect more NDP MPs in the next federal election. NDP strategists are seeking to capitalize on widespread discontent with the Liberal government's pro-corporate face, lack of funding for badly needed social programs from childcare to housing, and pro-Washington policies.

However, it is notable that even these progressive messages are pitched in a safe, non-threatening way – speaking of a better “balanced” approach to the budget, for example. Signs of the NDP's continued trajectory to the right, in other words, are still very evident under Layton's leadership.

THE NDP SOLUTION

Rather than moving towards being a committed oppositional force in Parliament, the federal NDP appears to be positioning itself as a power broker to negotiate some modest reforms from above.

It's a strategy that has already won them points, and with surpluses accumulating in Ottawa it's hard to deny that choices are possible and modest reforms can be won.

But the NDP's leverage in parliament is largely dependent on holding the balance of power. This is why electoral reform is high on Jack Layton's agenda, even if provincial NDP parties may be quite lukewarm to the idea of proportional representation. Bringing in a form of proportional representation would clearly benefit the federal NDP, which has consistently been under-represented in Ottawa, and dovetails perfectly with the 'elect more NDP MPPs' strategy.

A fairer proportional electoral system would increase the likelihood of minority



The NDP federal caucus celebrates the 'success' of its neoliberal budget.

governments, especially with other factors already eroding the Liberal Party's base of support.

The Liberals have been able to dominate politics by maintaining a strong base in Quebec. But in the wake of revelations from the Gomery Inquiry, Liberal support has tumbled – perhaps long term. If the Bloc Québécois can consolidate its hold in Quebec, it will become more difficult for the Liberals to win majority governments.

However, even taking these factors into consideration, if the NDP is going to play the minority government game, it is going to need to broaden its appeal to win the required seats or, in the case of proportional representation, a higher percentage of the electoral vote.

CALCULATED POLICY

The challenge for an increasingly right-leaning NDP is how to differentiate itself from the other neoliberal parties. The NDP leadership has attempted to do this on issues of economic and foreign policy in carefully chosen ways.

George W. Bush is enormously unpopular in Canada. The NDP went with the tide of public opinion and correctly opposed the war in Iraq and Canada's participation. Similarly, the NDP emphasized Canadian sovereignty and focused much attention against Canada's participation in Star Wars, the US's projected

missile defense system.

But the NDP has shied away from challenging the comfortable assumptions of left liberals and the myths of a benign independent Canadian foreign policy and peace-keeping role.

The NDP has not clearly spoken out in defense of immigrant and refugee rights and Native sovereignty, or against the border control and the government's national security agenda. It has been invisible in opposition to Canada's criminal role in ousting former Haitian President Aristide and installing a murderous new regime. Similarly on Afghanistan. And it voted for a budget that contained massive multi-billion dollar increases in military spending. This was not an oversight. It was a clear choice and it should raise alarm bells among the Left.

FOLLOWING THE TREND

Jack Layton's effort to mimic Tony Blair's war of civilization versus terrorism should not come as a total shock.

Despite zigs and zags caused by the complexities of Canadian politics, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) / NDP have reflected the international evolution of social democracy.

Social democratic parties were initially clearly identified with the working class and the idea of socialism. During World War I, however, social democratic parties

embraced a social patriotic course, aligning themselves with their own country's war aims. This produced a split. Forces backing the Russian Revolution formed the Communist International.

Since that time, Social Democrats have been reformists committed to evolutionary change through electoral means – not revolution. As reforms were won, social democratic parties became identified with the growth of the welfare state and Keynesian economics (the use of government spending as an economic stimulus particularly to counter economic depressions).

Today, these reforms are being eroded and, in many cases, completely reversed. Since the end of the Cold War, global capitalism has gone on a prolonged ideological, political and economic counter-offensive to reverse working class and popular gains.

In the new neoliberal era, social democracy has lost any further reformist impulse and slid into a rather tired and passive defense of the existing status quo.

The idea of 'New Labour' is an attempt to reverse this trend, except not in the way socialists might hope. Under this vision, social democrats have embraced the new capitalist order and market-based reforms including privatization.

Tony Blair, leader of Britain's Labour Party, epitomizes this trend. In office Blair has pursued policies to make British capitalism more internationally competitive, while promised social reforms have lagged behind.

NDP PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS

The ideas of 'New Labour' have taken hold in Canada and have clearly played a role in shaping NDP policy, particularly in provinces where the NDP have formed the government.

The track record of the Manitoba and Saskatchewan NDP governments are pretty clear and the BC NDP under Carole James is fervently trying to emulate this trend to the right.

James' predecessor, Glen Clark, had won the 1996 election by using populist and anti-establishment rhetoric. However the government ended in disaster, alienating most of its supporters, introducing 'welfare reform,' attacking the poor and failing to placate capital interests which,

sensing blood, went for the kill.

This time around, in the election that was held earlier this year, the 'New NDP' sought to pose itself as the centrist alternative to Gordon Campbell's extremism. Was this just crass electoralism magnified under a first-past-the-post system? Or did it constitute a surrender to the business agenda as outlined in a Left Turn leaflet supporting Will Offley's candidacy in Vancouver Hastings?

It appears that the latter is more likely. "The BC New Democrats want to shed their confrontational past and form an unprecedented alliance with the province's business community," James was quoted in the Vancouver Sun as saying during a meeting of the Coalition of BC Businesses. She said traditional NDP social values can work with and support the values of entrepreneurship and risk-taking that can help drive "economic innovation and job creation."

Even the Right appeared confused by this 'New NDP.' Economist Jason Clemens, director of fiscal studies at the Fraser Institute, was quoted in the Georgian Straight as saying that the NDP platform's spending commitments were "rather small" and that the NDP's pledge to spend an additional \$75 million on health care was "not material" in comparison to the overall health budget. Clemens said the NDP appeared to have the Liberals' "tax policy in this election campaign."

It wasn't a misquote. Throughout the election campaign, the BC NDP continued to align itself with capitalist interests and refused to even oppose some of the most onerous actions of the Campbell government. "There will be things that the Liberals have done we may not be able to undo. There may be agreements in place such as the BC Rail deal that we would not be able to bring back into government...because of the cost," NDP candidate Vaughan Palmer was quoted as saying in the Vancouver Sun. "Ditto for all those (8,000) health care jobs being contracted out to private companies...We are not talking about going back four years and putting back programs and services."

Given this stance, it was hardly

surprising to those on the Left when the NDP also took pains to distance itself from labour. Despite the millions of dollars and staff resources that the BC Federation of Labour ploughed into a parallel anti-Liberal "Count Me In" campaign pitched to union members and its vocal support for the NDP, the party distanced itself from labour. In a symbolic nomination, Gregor Robertson, a Happy Place Juice businessman, defeated former CUPE President Judy Darcy.

The NDP is incapable of becoming a vehicle for a renewed or new left.

By the time election day rolled around in BC on May 17, 2005, it was clear that the NDP party offered little to progressive voters. Its rebound was driven, not by any love for the NDP, but basic if not developed anti-liberal sentiments. The neoliberal offensive in BC has scored major successes and inflicted defeats on the working class and social movements. However the defeat has not been total and the ideology of privatization, two-tier health-care and reduced benefits and rights have not been fully accepted. This sentiment enabled the NDP to recoup its losses while emphasizing to the ruling class it would be a safe choice.

BUILDING A 'NEW LEFT'

The best way to get beyond the NDP is through the building of strong movements and mass-based struggle. Mass consciousness can change rapidly in moments of intense struggle and self-organization.

Unfortunately, despite the hopefulness that many experienced during the height

of the global justice movement, at the moment we are experiencing a downturn of struggles of unknown duration.

Very different approaches are possible.

Some call for working within the NDP in order to transform it. NDP membership has risen under Jack Layton and many members are not hardened social democrats. However, this has not led to a new direction and is widely viewed on the socialist left as an exercise in futility.

Many socialists and labour movement activists have argued the working class needs to have its own independent class-based parties. Talk of a new labour party has withered, however, and the New Politics Initiative dissolved and returned to the NDP fold. Thus the option of either critical support to the NDP or hold your nose and vote NDP remains. This has been a longstanding approach on the Left but is it really viable, even in the short-term?

Substantial sections of the radical Left, not surprisingly given what exists, reject any engagement in elections and existing state politics. The politics of direct action and anti-capitalist resistance are emphasized. There is a vast and growing partly generational gulf between this outlook and the large numbers who at least passively still turn to the NDP.

Another possibility is to promote a socialist alternative in a wide variety of arenas. This was the approach of Left Turn, which sought without being electoralist to use the election as a platform to promote struggle and challenge the notion that there is no alternative. To this end, Left Turn elaborated a series of measures designed to meet human need and confront capital.

While in my view the NDP is incapable of becoming a vehicle for a renewed or new left, there is nevertheless not a single tactic or panacea to build a new left. However, it is important not just to resist but to create an alternative socialist political project based on working class politics, radical democracy and the support of social movements. We will not hear the last of the NDP until it is replaced by something fundamentally better. ★

FEATURE

Occupation is not women's liberation: Building a feminist anti-war movement

BY HUIBIN AMEE CHEW

Iraqi author and dissident Haifa Zangana, formerly imprisoned under Saddam Hussein's regime but adamantly opposed to US occupation, writes, "in the aftermath of the 1958 revolution ending the British-imposed monarchy [in Iraq]... women's organizations achieved within two years what over 30 years of British occupation failed to: legal equality."

Two years after the US-led invasion of Iraq, what are we to make of the Bush administration's alleged project to bring it democracy and raise the status of women? Early on following the invasion, mainstream US media such as *The New York Times* reported on growing insecurity, including the escalating rapes and kidnappings of women and girls. The media tended to frame this problem as caused by Iraqi men and indigenous patriarchy at its roots – with skillful US intervention needed to alleviate the situation. The international anti-war and anti-occupation movement was largely unable to deliver an adequate response to the immediate issue of daily sexual violence at the hands of Iraqis – how has it failed to tackle issues particular to Iraqi women, and what is at stake?

This article is a plea for greater feminist intervention in the anti-imperialist and anti-war movement. I discuss how the US invasion and occupation of Iraq have not brought liberation to Iraqi women – but rather, resulted in the worsening of living conditions along gendered lines.

'LIBERATING' AND PLANTING 'DEMOCRACY' IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN? WHOSE 'DEMOCRACY'?

The justification of imperialism on humanitarian grounds has a sordid history that dies hard. But Third World feminists have pointed to a complex patriarchal collusion between male elites of both the occupying and subject states. The supposed beneficiaries of imperial magnanimity are lost in the shuffle of their rulers' own more pressing economic and political interests.

This entangled complicity and exploitation should make US feminists – as stakeholders in the world's premier military and economic superpower – uncomfortable. How do paternalistic

leaders continue to maneuver and manipulate the interests of certain women and minorities for imperial ends? Have they 'co-opted' feminist aims – and if so, whose feminism? While claiming to stand for womankind, do they exploit or depend upon the fractures in this 'sisterhood'? Who do they pit against each other in this process – and whose agendas are served when feminists willingly cooperate?

The Bush administration has flaunted the liberation of Muslim women, and later the promotion of women-friendly democracy, as central principles justifying its invasions and subsequent occupations of both Afghanistan and Iraq. The ideological coherence of acting as a humanitarian benefactor is a unifying theme behind the otherwise fractured, amnesiac rationale to this administration's foreign policy – where the threat of terrorism, supposed weapons of mass destruction and evil dictatorships have alternately been held as reasons for military aggression.

Before discussing Iraq more extensively, though, it is useful to briefly revisit the invasion of Afghanistan, drawing attention to the collusion of liberal feminists with US militarism and imperialism.

AFGHANISTAN AND THE COMPLICITY OF AMERICAN FEMINISTS

In the weeks after 9/11, the Taliban's public executions of women were catapulted into mainstream view, as a focus of prime-time TV documentaries. Years-old email forwards about the Taliban's abuses began to recirculate among socially conscious youth, as the position of burqa-ed Muslim women grew to a matter of mainstream interest. Following the invasion of Afghanistan, Laura Bush was paraded before the UN Commission on the Status of Women on International Women's Day, 2002, to celebrate the US attack as a new chapter of "rebuilding" Afghan women's lives. Her husband continues to incessantly remind us how he has birthed a "new constitution, guaranteeing free elections and full participation by women," and opened education to both "boys and girls."

Ironically, the originator of the grisly documentary footage of women's murders that made national television was the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), a group vehemently opposed to both fundamentalist regimes and US military intervention. RAWA had their own

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message on International Women's Day, 2004: "The freedom of a nation is to be achieved by itself – similarly the real emancipation of women can be realized only by themselves. If that freedom is bestowed by others, it may be seized and violated any time."

RAWA prescribes an alternative method for social change: the intensification of mass movements and struggles by local Afghans against their oppressors. Yet despite its fame, including publicity from celebrities like Eve Ensler, RAWA's anti-war, pro-local movement stance has largely been ignored in American press. Liberal American feminists have helped enforce this silence by not acting to widely disseminate its analysis.

–What's more, prominent feminist organizations were complicit in aiding Bush's justification of the war on Afghanistan. Shortly after the bombardment began, leader of the Feminist Majority Eleanor Smeal met amicably with war generals: "They went off about the role of women in this effort and how imperative it was that women were now in every level of the Air Force and Navy ... It's a different kind of war," she is quoted as reporting about their chat. This tete-a-tete rode on years of feminist campaigning against the Taliban.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN IRAQ? A BRIEF BACKGROUND TO WOMEN'S STATUS BEFORE INVASION

Haifa Zangana, quoted at the beginning of this piece, writes the following in opposition to the US occupation: "The main misconception is to perceive Iraqi women as silent, powerless victims in a male-controlled society in urgent need of 'liberation.' This image fits conveniently into the big picture of the Iraqi people being passive victims who would welcome the occupation of their country. The reality is different."

In 1958, with the end of British indirect rule over Iraq, tens of thousands of Iraqi women demonstrated in the streets for their civil rights. They won the most egalitarian family civil code in the Arab world. Aspects of this progressive family law persisted until the eve of the US invasion, when Iraq still remained exceptional in the region. Divorce cases were to be heard only in civil courts, polygamy was outlawed unless the first wife consented and women divorcees had an equal right to custody over their children. Women's income was recognized as independent from their husbands'.

When Iraq's expanding economy needed women in the workforce during the 1970s and early 80s, Saddam Hussein's regime implemented policies to encourage their participation, such as generous maternity leaves, equal pay and benefits, and free higher education. For instance, the radical feminist group Redstockings has pointed out how before the US invasion, Iraq provided 62 days of maternity leave with the woman's wages paid 100% by its social security system. Its valuable analysis, focusing on economic arrangements and class inequality, hints towards what US feminists have to lose if we keep privileging our own country, with its privatized healthcare, as the epitome of women's liberation. Unlike the US, in fact, nearly all Gulf states have provisions for paid maternity leave. By contrast, Redstockings notes that US law offers 12 weeks of unpaid sick leave – if your employer has over 50 employees, and only if you



Women protesting warlords in Takhar province in Afghanistan.

have been working for the same employer for more than a year (the US is also one of a handful of countries that still provides no paid parental leave).

Despite Iraqi women's significant gains, their condition began to decline after the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War bankrupted the government. The Gulf War and subsequent US/UN sanctions exacerbated this process by crippling Iraq's economy. The economic hardships disproportionately affected women and girls. In the early 1980s, women had made up 40 percent of the nation's workforce, filling the war-time shortage of men. This deteriorated to 22% by 1992. Prostitution increased, and as women became jobless, their right to travel without a male relative was revoked. Childcare, education and transportation became impossibly expensive. Female literacy dropped sharply after the Gulf War as girls abandoned school to help with increasingly inconvenient household chores – resulting in the second largest gender gap in literacy for the region. In post-Gulf War years, more than a third of girls abandoned formal schooling before completing primary education. UNESCO reports that while 75% of Iraqi women were literate in 1987, this dropped to under 25% by 2001! At the same time, Hussein allowed a shift towards local religious and tribal codes; he amended the law in 1990 to permit honour killings without penalty. In the late 1990s, Hussein implemented new laws dismissing all female secretaries in government agencies and restricting women from work in the public sector. Economic hardships and political attacks worked in conjunction with each other to roll back the status of women; the connections between Iraqi women's loss of paid economic power and increased vulnerability to patriarchal attacks demands further exploration.

In the context of over 12 years of debilitating sanctions, the US occupation must be viewed as only the latest chapter of its role in the dramatic decline of conditions for Iraqi women. Nevertheless, in spite of their fragile position just before the 2003 invasion, Iraqi women constituted a larger portion of the paid workforce than women of many other Gulf States. To focus on an elite subsection of the population: more professional women held positions of power than in almost any other Middle Eastern country. In 1994, 11% of seats in Iraq's congress were filled by women, a percentage significantly higher than in other Gulf states. US women, incidentally, held only 10% of seats in

Congress the same year. Earlier, in 1987, Iraqi women had filled 13% of seats, compared to 5% held by US women the same year.

THE IMPACT OF INVASION AND OCCUPATION IN IRAQ

The US invasion and occupation have caused enormous violence and economic devastation. As of October 2004, the *Lancet*, in what remains the most authoritative study, estimated that military action and the subsequent occupation had resulted in the excess deaths of at least 100,000 Iraqis. Women and children of both sexes together made up the majority of those violently killed by coalition forces, according to this study. Acute malnutrition among children is now double pre-occupation levels – translating to 400,000 children who suffer from “wasting,” or dangerous protein deficiency. Unemployment hovers at over 70 percent. Obviously excess deaths would be considerably higher if the study were conducted today.

In a country where 55 to 65% of the current population is female, of course women and girls are heavily affected by these conditions. Repeating the pattern during the sanctions in the 1990s, Iraqi women are the hardest hit by unemployment. Men are preferred for the few jobs available, although many women are widows or single heads of households. Moreover, formerly 72 % of salaried Iraqi women were public employees, so many lost their jobs when government ministries were dismantled after the invasion. While before the invasion indigent women could at least rely on food rationing, today they are left to fend for themselves.

As the US continues to bomb Iraqi hospitals, electricity in large cities remains intermittent, water unsafe and telephones non-operational. At the time of the November, 2004 presidential elections, the Bush administration instigated increased bombing runs in Iraq, secure that the papers and public opinion would be focused elsewhere, but the tactic of aerial bombardment is particularly deadly to non-combatants who just happen to be in the way. Almost two years after the invasion, reconstruction is damnably absent. As of June 30, 2005, the United States had set aside \$24 billion for Iraq's reconstruction. Of this, only \$9 billion has been paid out for work done. More tellingly still, the latest report from Congress's investigative arm, the Government Accountability Office, indicates that as of May, 2005, power generation in Iraq remained below the level before the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Iraqis are facing overwhelming burdens in carrying out the simplest tasks for household subsistence; Zangana discusses the extra toil that falls on women responsible for finding clean water and basic cooking supplies, writing, “In the land of oil, they have to queue five hours a day to get kerosene or petrol.”

Rapes of women and girls skyrocketed after the invasion, with the displacement of usual law and order. But investigating these were no priority of US authorities, who had toppled the previous police and court system, only to replace it with a makeshift and illegitimate military force. Instead, occupying troops were engaged in arbitrary roundups and killings in pursuit of terrorist insurgents that brutalized locals and ransacked their homes. Mislplaced and heavy-handed conduct put together, the occupation has failed to offer real security; kidnapping and the growth of trafficking now keeps women and girls in fear of venturing

outside – “prisoners in their own homes,” in Zangana's words.

A May, 2004 Red Cross report disclosed that 70 to 90% of 43,000 Iraqis detained in the last year were arrested by mistake. Today, in a form of collective punishment, coalition authorities regularly imprison the female relatives (and even alleged lovers) of male suspects, to use as hostages. Needless to say such treatment utterly denies that women have a separate legal status from their husbands, brothers, fathers, sons, or alleged lovers. Along with the other innocent detainees, these women are imprisoned for supposed ‘intelligence purposes’ – in other words, because the occupying authorities deem it convenient and have no accountability to the public. Belying the focus on male prisoners in the Abu Ghraib scandal, the sexual abuse and gang rape of female detainees is widespread, a fact known throughout in Iraq that has received little attention in the US.

Iraq contains the world's second largest oil reserves, and the US has already begun building bases on its soil. The US government's priorities – besides establishing control over these reserves to influence world oil price fluctuation – have been to privatize and sell entire sectors of Iraq's economy, as well as lucrative ‘reconstruction’ contracts, to corporate cronies of the military-industrial complex. Besides major defense contractors like Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Northrop Grumman, which received boosts from the invasion itself, Halliburton, Bechtel and other corporate heavies have won no-bid contracts to ‘reconstruct’ Iraq and manage its infrastructure. They have reaped tremendous profits at the expense of Iraqis and US taxpayers. Although reports of fraud abound, the investments of US corporations in Iraq are backed up risk-free by the Iraq Development Fund – formerly the UN oil-for-food program – which consists mainly of Iraq's oil revenues.

The US occupation authority restructured Iraq's economy in flagrant violation of international law on occupation and, needless to say, without the democratic consent of Iraqis. Besides the sale of national industries to private corporations, its ‘shock therapy’ reforms included the liberalization of foreign investment, taxes and tariffs. The corporate tax rate was capped at an extremely low 15%. J.P. Morgan now manages the newly formed Trade Bank of Iraq, set up to favour companies from militarily contributing nations, regardless of the quality and price of their products. Through it, Iraqi ministries can borrow funds to buy equipment from overseas suppliers by mortgaging national oil revenues.

Despite their profiteering, corporations have actually managed to sue Iraq for millions of dollars in ‘war reparations’ for ‘lost profits.’ As of March 2005, Iraq was saddled with a debt of \$200 million in such ‘reparations’ to companies like Bechtel, Halliburton, Shell, Mobil, Nestle, Pepsi, KFC and Toys R Us. What's worse, this debt is dwarfed by an unpayable sovereign debt of \$125 billion. The industrialized nations that are its creditors are working to make the sovereign debt's partial cancellation contingent on compliance with IMF austerity programs, which will wreak economic havoc on the majority of Iraqis. Feminists have extensively documented the disproportionate impact IMF structural adjustment programs have had on poor women in other countries.

The Bush administration is more committed to ensuring control over Iraq's oil reserves, and establishing an economy

dominated by US corporations, than to the rights and well-being of Iraqi people. Using military control to pursue its economic and strategic interests continues to run in direct conflict with, and come at the expense of, accountability to the Iraqi public. Its harsh measures further undermine the occupiers' legitimacy. The Bush administration's hypocrisy and lies have been evident in the conduct of its occupying forces. From the beginning of the occupation, US forces stopped or nullified elections in a number of cities, repeatedly used violence to repress peaceful public protests, raided and sacked the offices of Iraqi trade unions and shut down newspapers. The US has also installed a series of puppet governing authorities. Unfortunately, the newly 'elected' regime will only prove to be the latest in a string of nominal 'handovers' staged to divert public opinion. Naomi Klein has noted that if anything, significant support for the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) in the elections, and the routing of the US's handpicked stooge, Iyad Allawi, represented a strong vote against the US occupation. The second plank of the UIA's platform called for a timetable for the withdrawal of multinational forces in Iraq, while other aspects repudiated the economic restructuring under Bremer. A Zogby poll two days before the election found that 82% of Sunni and 69% of Shiites favoured US forces withdrawing immediately or after an elected government is in place. Yet the Pentagon plans troop escalations and the government has no intention of ending either military or economic occupation, much less setting a timetable for such. The war is not and has not been about bringing democracy to Iraq.

Altogether, the occupation has reinforced and colluded with endemic patriarchy to worsen the situation of Iraqi women. Its gendered effects have been to intensify the harms of patriarchy in Iraq, adding new levels of violence and deprivation. If Iraqi men are perpetuating the kidnappings and rapes of women, they do so in the context of the occupying authorities' carelessness and inability to foster security. If Iraqi women face job discrimination, severe economic hardships have only worsened their plight. Zangana suggests some of unemployment's gendered effects: "Unemployment... is exacerbating ... prostitution, backstreet abortion and honour killing."

WHY WON'T OCCUPATION BRING LIBERATION TO IRAQI WOMEN?

The US occupation cannot represent the best interests of Iraqi women because of the ulterior motives part and parcel to the structures of its enforcement. Its lack of democratic transparency and accountability to Iraqis – as well as the US government's lack of accountability to the its public – are barriers to the reform of the occupation's ground operations, and the main motives that shape them. Furthermore, the Bush administration and the military-industrial complex it represents, only benefit, at least in the short-term, from substituting true accountability with P.R.

stunts.

Putting its maintenance of indirect regional control first, the Bush administration has proved willing to collaborate with conservative elements in its hand-picked Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), as well as its ensuring puppet authorities, recalling its tactics in Afghanistan. From the first meeting for post-Baathist reconstruction, where only four out of 80 delegates were women, to the IGC where three out of 25 seats were filled by women (before one was assassinated), the US government has decreased the upper-level government representation of women by filling their former parliamentary seats with men. The former IGC included conservative forces which passed a resolution for sharia law to replace the standardized family civil code, essentially allowing for the despotism of local clerics to legislate the role of women in families. Thousands of Iraqi women took to the streets

and helped raise an international outcry that caused Paul Bremer to eventually overturn the resolution. While this move allowed Bremer to pose as the saviour of women's rights, in reality the Bush administration has been hedging its political bets, if you will.

The Bush administration appointed conservative Islamists to power, only to defy them when politically practical. The dynamics of the controversy over sharia illustrate the limits of the occupation's commitment to women's equality, because the US's first priority is to remain in control over Iraq's oil and economy. Meanwhile, other women did not even bother to protest the controversial resolution because they felt the IGC irrelevant and inactive regarding the problems of their daily lives.

At times, the Bush administration's gestures towards uplifting Iraqi women are clearly an empty hoax for feminism that should disturb even liberals who support the occupation. In the winter of 2005, the US State department launched a \$10 million "Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative," to train women in political participation for the January election. Most of the money was allocated to organizations embedded in the Bush administration, including the reactionary Independent Women's Forum (IWF). The IWF was founded by Lynne Cheney, Labor Secretary Elaine Chao and rightwing National Review editor Kate O'Beirne in 1991, as a counter to the so-called "radical feminism" of NOW. Ironically – given Iraq's history – IWF is opposed to, among other things, paid maternity leave, government-provided child-care, equal pay for equal work (because it violates 'free market' principles), minimum quotas for women in government service and the *Violence Against Women Act*.

The Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative can be seen as just one instance of the paternalism inherent in the State Department's democracy trainings more generally. Past orchestrated events tutoring what democracy means – because Iraqis need to be instructed about their own interests – have involved scripted panels performed before audiences, without any room for confrontational questioning or genuine dialogue. Zangana's

the occupation has reinforced and colluded with endemic patriarchy to worsen the situation of Iraqi women. Its gendered effects have been to intensify the harms of patriarchy in Iraq, adding new levels of violence and deprivation.

infuriation is understandable.

Although token women have been appointed to political positions, Zangana criticizes their role as pawns of the occupation incapable of challenging its violence: "The silence of the 'feminists' of Allawi's regime is deafening. The suffering of their sisters in cities showered with napalm, phosphorus and cluster bombs by US jet fighters ... is met with rhetoric about training for democracy."

WOMEN AND RESISTANCE – WHAT NOW?

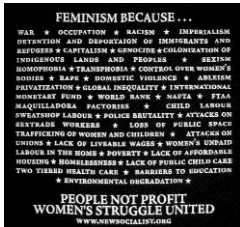
Rather than helping Iraqis, the Bush administration's posturing at defending women's interests has delimited a difficult and fraught political terrain for those committed to women's rights. Its pretensions at women's liberation, combined with the sheer brutality of the occupation, have only narrowed possibilities for resistance that is both feminist and anti-imperialist, by placing feminist organizers in a tough political bind in terms of both constructing ideological appeals and taking practical action. For one, as the place of women becomes a contested battleground between nationalism and occupation, it grows harder for feminist organizers to independently push an agenda that risks coming in conflict with nationalist conservatives. That is, the ideological confusion created by the US occupation posing as feminist lends credence to reactionaries who further an anti-woman agenda in the name of nationalism, and when patriarchal actors begin with the upper hand in terms of political power, they may be in a better place to define the character of a unifying nationalist movement than feminists trying to carve their own space.

Women's organizing has been shaped significantly and hindered by the occupation's direct repression, as well as the attacks on women it has unleashed. When women are afraid to even step outdoors, their possibilities for political participation are circumscribed. When women must deal first and foremost with the work of everyday survival, they may be less inclined to devote time to lobbying an irrelevant and unresponsive occupation authority for abstract rights; they may be increasingly relegated to the tasks of holding together their families. Now, when resistance is propelled by armed insurgency women's involvement as equal participants on the same footing of men, given social norms and political inequality, will be marginalized until they organize against these conservative forces. At the same time, the brutality of the occupation lends urgency to those who would unite resistance under a reactionary agenda.

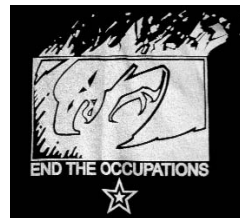
So what course should be taken? Must we

dismiss the political exploitation of Iraqi women as inevitable? Iraqi women appear to be in a tenuous 'lose-lose' situation: they lose if the US military and economic occupation remain, plunging the country into further violent polarization and indigence; and possibly lose if the US military immediately leaves, transferring power to male-dominated forces. A Women for Women International survey in 2004 found that 94% of Iraqi women want secure legal rights for women, around 80% believe in unlimited participation in local and national political councils, 95% want no restrictions on female education, and 57% want no restrictions on women's employment. The Bush administration might like us to believe there are only two choices in the long-run – US occupation or fundamentalist authoritarianism – but unfolding events only underline the imperative for an alternative to this bind. The struggle of groups like RAWA can serve as inspiration. International anti-imperialist activists can act in solidarity with Iraqi women organizing against the occupation and for their rights. Feminists in the US and Canada must recognize and resist how imperialism reinforces patriarchy and the oppression of women.★

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The struggle to maintain grassroots feminist responses to male violence

BY ANNA WILLATS, MANDY BONISTEEL AND MARILYN MCLEAN

Women in Canada have been organizing to fight violence for over 30 years. Every service that supports those affected by violence in relationships, sexual violence, sexual harassment and child sexual abuse exists because of the relentless efforts of feminist activists and counsellors to awaken a society deep in denial about the extent of violence committed against women and children. The vision of those who created the first services for women and children who experienced violence was that counselling and advocacy would be provided within the context of networked feminist community activists working together to transform a violent, patriarchal culture.

What did this vision mean for the provision of services? It meant that a woman using the services could expect to receive support and information from, and connect with, others who shared similar experiences, reinforcing the reality that she was not alone in her experience and that it was not the result of something she had done wrong. While receiving support, she could seek out and find information about the oppression of women as a social class. She could receive support in an environment where others were seeking to create change through activism and public education, strengthening the links between her own internal transformation and social transformation.

She could expect to remain anonymous, with no documentation of her use of the service, if that was what she wanted. What she would not expect was that her response to violence would lead to psychiatric labelling, or that information about her experience and her healing process would be extensively documented in files that might later be used in ways that she perceived to be against her best interests.

DEPOLITICIZATION

When early funding arrangements were being negotiated between anti-violence activists and provincial governments, funders frequently wanted to position anti-violence services under the health

services umbrella. Feminist activists in Ontario in the 1980s strongly resisted, arguing that rape and partner abuse need to be viewed as community and social justice issues. Their concern was that treating individual women's and children's responses to patriarchal violence primarily as health issues would lead to individualized "band-aid" solutions. They worried that services provided without a gender analysis could lead to the pathologizing of individual responses to a violent society.

The overwhelming success of the early efforts of anti-violence feminists meant that issues of violence against women and children came to the attention of legal and health professionals in the 1980s. The inevitable result in a capitalist economy was that sexual and gender violence became commodified. Author Louise Armstrong (in *Northeast Magazine*, 1983), describes this process in relation to growing societal awareness of incest:

"You could hear the gears of specialization grinding, the carving up of victim populations, the negotiation for turf, the vying for funding, for prestige, for place. Never having heard it before, I did not then identify the hum and buzz as the sound of persons professionalizing."

In the early 1990s, Premier Bob Rae's NDP government imposed organizational and financial audits on Ontario rape and sexual assault centres, and began efforts to regulate the composition of their boards of directors. Around the same time, the federal Liberals made changes to the *Income Tax Act*, limiting the amount and kind of political/social change work charities could do. Women's services had to devote more and more staff time to tracking and accountability mechanisms, financial policy development, compliance issues and other activities that compete with and undermine

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Anna Willats has been questioning authority and confronting the abuse of power since she was a teenager. She has a long history in the women's anti-violence community and in police accountability groups and organizing in Toronto, is co-chair of the Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts and is the proud lesbian mom of two young people.

Mandy Bonisteel has worked as an advocate, activist, consultant and therapist in the anti-violence movement for over 20 years. Her international work includes developing support groups with women in Kosovo, NGO capacity building and family medicine nursing curriculum development in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Ontario, she authored the Ontario CAS/VAW Collaborative Curriculum for workers supporting children who have witnessed women abuse.

Marilyn McLean has been active in anti-violence activism and sexual violence support work since the early 1980s. She works in a feminist rape crisis centre and has taught in the AWCCA program since 1994. Marilyn is also involved in research on how feminist collectives develop anti-racism and other anti-oppression policies and practices.

delivery of services and pursuit of necessary social change. Many women's service agencies adopted corporate governance models in an effort to cope with increasing demands for 'accountability.'

By the mid-1990s, significant amounts of government and private funding were pouring into medical and other health services focused on the treatment of 'trauma' survivors. 'Trauma' was now the catch-all term used to designate the effects of rape, child rape, being beaten by the persons who are supposed to love you and other forms of gendered violence. At the same time, governments slashed funding to cornerstone services for women and, in some cases, launched blatant efforts to force grassroots community services into medical and legal environments.

Government determination to shut down feminist responses to male violence and stop criticism of government became clear at a 1996 meeting in London, Ontario. Dianne Cunningham, then Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, told several representatives of women's anti-violence services that their funding would be withdrawn if they were not seen to be co-operating with the government. Shortly after this, activist women publicly exposed a government-hired consultant's paper, the Maguire Report, which outlined plans to take over and radically change the way front-line woman abuse services were delivered. The Tories were forced momentarily to back away from this vision.

EFFECTS OF CUTS ON SERVICES

Is it coincidental that efforts to strangle feminist services at their source took place just as medical and other professional communities showed a new-found interest in violence against women issues? Three of the most obvious effects of cuts and institutionalization on services and on those who use them are: separation of social transformation work from support of individual survivors; medicalization of anti-violence issues, characterized by a rapidly growing emphasis on definition and treatment of symptoms as opposed to counselling and advocacy; and creation of private services that are accessible only to economically privileged survivors of violence.

The first of these effects, the growing

separation (by both government and services) of the work to transform society from the work to support individual survivors of violence, is reflected in the increasing credentialism – reliance on formal, regulated education to provide skills and knowledge needed for a particular position – found in women's services. The women's anti-violence movement was born from the philosophy that institutionally-based education, espe-

The idea that credentials are required to advocate for and provide services to women who have experienced violence is antithetical to the meaning of feminism.

cially in the fields of social work, psychology and medicine, serves to encode the social, political and institutional conditions that maintain women's subordinate social and economic position. The idea that credentials are required to advocate for and provide services to women who have experienced violence is antithetical to the meaning of feminism.

Medical sector amalgamation had decreased opportunities for university-credentialed social workers seeking student placement or jobs; the anti-violence sector became a new frontier for universities in search of graduate employment and research sites. Many anti-violence agencies, especially those seeking government or corporate funding that employed the rhetoric of 'mental health' and 'credentials,' became convinced that their agencies would be buoyed by the presence of 'clinically trained' employees. Ontario feminist researcher Linda Green observes that feminist anti-violence workers began using the term "deskilling" to refer to the devaluation and displacement of feminist anti-violence and anti-oppression practices under credentialism. In this context, deskilling is the "sense of skills deficiency produced by credentialism and also by circumstances of service scarcity, that encourages deference to the authority of professionally legitimized medicalizing and evidence-based practices."

Meanwhile, the numbers of women seeking shelter in Ontario increased significantly with cuts and restructuring in the province's health and welfare services. The pressure placed on shelters overwhelmed by rising demands due to the closure of other services, particularly mental health supports, created concerns among some anti-violence workers about the adequacy of their skills. Some agencies continued to make it clear that their role was to advocate for women involved in the psychiatric and mental health system but not provide these services themselves, while others worried that not providing similar services to women in these situations would mean abandoning them.

The corporatization of health and social services also resulted in the widespread imposition of outcomes-based evaluation measures normally used to measure profit in a market economy, thus attempting to quantify activities that do not fit into the product-based language of business. Measuring whether women leave their abusive partners depends largely on available options such as welfare and affordable housing; it does not measure the effectiveness of the feminist anti-violence services that support and provide safety to women, and it deters feminist organizations from their social justice mandate. Additionally, the notion that anti-violence services should be measured by the numbers of women with increased 'mental health' who then make better partner choices, holds women responsible for the abuse. The responsibility for decreasing the incidence of woman abuse lies with each perpetrator, with meaningful criminal justice interventions, and with society. This increased business focus has contributed to the imposition of 'outputs' that undermine feminist advocacy.

MEDICALIZATION

The medicalization of gendered violence issues has profound implications for services and service users, including: provision of services in institutional, medical settings which are intimidating to many survivors of violence, particularly those who are socially marginalized; reduction of experiences of violence to a list of symptoms to be treated, ignoring the need of many survivors to locate their experience within a larger social context; and increasingly detailed documentation

of service users' experience, with a corresponding decrease in the potential for anonymity. Despite the best efforts of committed feminist counsellors and advocates, it is not uncommon for women seeking support to be asked to provide health cards, medical records, social insurance numbers and proof of citizenship. For significant numbers of women, the decision to use a service results in institutionalized surveillance. Counsellors are frequently asked questions about the kinds of records they keep by frightened women weighing their need for support against their fear of surveillance.

Finally, cuts to feminist services and the privatization of violence against women issues have resulted in the creation of for-profit counselling services for the middle and upper classes. The existence of private services allows economically privileged survivors of violence to have more control over their healing and to make decisions about the course of justice they wish to pursue, free from government surveillance. Those who use public services will likely be from marginalized communities – vulnerable to the police, mental health workers and children's aid societies, who are often called in to intervene without the consent or control of the survivor of abuse or their family. The privacy and confidentiality provided by private services may appear

to be helpful to individuals, however it is problematic on two levels. The most obvious problem is that this privacy is available only to those who can afford to pay or who are covered by private benefits. But the deeper issue, of concern to the individual as well as to society, is that individualized treatments of social problems can only result in temporary relief. The conditions that have led directly and indirectly to the abuse remain unchanged.

Today, government funding to community-based services is largely limited to collaborative projects focused on training staff within public institutions such as the police, Legal Aid, Children's Aid Society, Settlement Ontario and others. Workers' time and energy is spent providing training, consultation and advice to the very institutions that engage in discriminatory practices toward women. Fewer and fewer dollars are being invested in front-line service provision, and the Harris cuts remain largely intact, continuing the increased demands on those services. Anti-violence workers are stretched to the limit, while women in Ontario struggle to cope with mounting poverty, racism, isolation, violence and other abuses.

There is every reason to think that offloading and abandonment of women's services will continue. In March 2005, Ontario women heard from Sandra

Pupatello, Minister responsible for Women's Issues and the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), that "new investments will go to help women's agencies, such as shelters, transitional and second-stage housing to improve their functional capacity and help them become more financially independent." Minister Pupatello is also the chair of an ad hoc cabinet committee (known as the 'Mod Squad') charged with finding alternate financing for services currently funded by government.

CHALLENGES AND CHOICES

Women's anti-violence services and agencies are now faced with difficult challenges and choices. Do they devote more time and energy to non-government fundraising, seek corporate sponsorship, insist on university degrees for their workers and involve business people and others with financial connections on their boards of directors? Will they speak out against legal and medical institutions and government when they neglect, abuse and further marginalize women struggling to escape male abuse and violence, even if it means jeopardizing funding or good will in their community? How will they refuse to join the labelling of women's coping skills as 'mental health' problems?

Can feminist anti-violence programs resist corporate intrusion and organizational depoliticization? Women's organizations were founded on political activism and advocacy before the formation of the organizational and funding structures in which they now exist. Thirty years later, Canada's social architecture and corporatized political environment look much different, but the basics of anti-oppression awareness and action remain critical to the creation of communities in which all members can be assured of safety. Engaging all members of anti-violence organizations, credentialed or not, in ongoing political consciousness-raising and the unpacking of internalized dominance is a necessity. Unless the work to transform society and the support provided to individual survivors are reattached, any support provided to women who experience violence would simply mirror the patriarchal society in which violence thrives. ★

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The ugly business of women's beauty

BY JACKIE ESMONDE

Dove, the company famous for its “99 percent pure” soap, recently launched the “Campaign for Real Beauty”, an ad campaign designed to challenge unrealistic images of women in advertising. One ad features a curvy young woman, and poses the question “oversized or outstanding?”. It invites women to go to the Dove website to cast their vote and join the company in its “search for a wider definition of beauty” and in its efforts to “inspire women to celebrate themselves.”

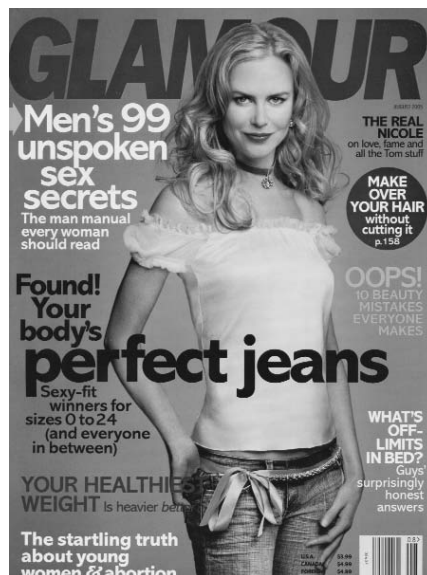
Unlike most mass media images of beauty that we see, the Dove campaign includes women of colour, women over 40 and women who weigh more than 100 pounds. The campaign has won accolades for its social conscience, including in the feminist pop culture magazine *Bitch*.

However, there is a contradiction in this “Campaign for Real Beauty”. While the website and the ads are of “real women” who are proud of their “real curves,” the actual goal of the campaign is to convince women to buy “Dove Firming”: a product designed to reduce the appearance of cellulite in two weeks.

Well, guess what Dove – real women have cellulite.

Although the campaign presents more realistic role models for women than is the norm, the central message remains the same. Beauty is not something that comes naturally to women: it requires endless effort, as well as the purchase of various products designed to change or hide women's problem areas. The “real” in real beauty should be in quotes.

Dove aside, we are constantly inundated with mass media images of the so-called ideal that we must hope to achieve to be beautiful. In film, magazines, ads



Glamour is one of many magazines regularly portraying unrealistic images of women.

and television, the image of this ideal is invariably that of a white, affluent, stick-figure woman with large breasts and glamour.

BEAUTY AND VIOLENCE

The weight of today's fashion model is 25 percent below that of ordinary women. Few of us will ever achieve such proportions, nor should we if we want to be healthy and happy. Given that the images we now see of today's fashion models were likely digitally altered, the beauty ideal has become so far from possible that it must be computer generated.

The impossibility of attaining these ideals has not stopped women from doing considerable harm to themselves in the attempt. For example, feminists have long drawn a link between unrealistic beauty ideals and the rise of eating disorders. In a quest for thinness, women

starve themselves, vomit, have their stomachs stapled, their jaws wired shut and fat sucked out.

Not only are we told that we are too fat, but we are also told that everything else about our bodies needs improvement. Media images teach us that we need to inject collagen into our lips because they are too thin. We're told to inject botox into our faces to freeze nerve endings and iron out wrinkles. The loss of the ability to show emotion with our faces is a small price to pay for beauty. Our teeth are not white enough, nor is our skin, our eyes are not blue enough, our hair is not shiny or straight enough, nothing we do is ever enough.

Despite gains made since the rise of the women's movement, the pressure on women today to adhere to beauty standards may be even greater than it was 30 years ago. And the standards are not only more difficult to meet, but the targets for this pressure are even younger now that the beauty industry has discovered the profit to be made from the so-called “tweens”, young girls just about to enter their teenage years. The greater accessibility and circulation of mass media means that the influence of beauty ideals has broadened both geographically and across classes.

There is considerable and increasing profit to be made from convincing women that their value lies in their appearance. Since there is greater pressure on women than on men to be beautiful, the fashion industry can make women pay more than men for the same consumer goods such as clothing, hair care products and haircuts. Each year in the US, approximately \$40 billion dollars is spent on the diet industry including diet books, diet foods, diet programs and weight-loss gimmicks. According to the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, the overall number of cosmetic procedures has increased 228 percent since 1997. One-third of cosmetic surgery patients are between the ages of 35 and 40, 22 percent are between the ages of 26 and 34. Eighteen percent of people getting cosmetic surgery are under the age of 25.

Cosmetic surgery is increasingly affordable for middle-income earners, and as such more women have access to

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breast implants, nose jobs and other cosmetic modifications. Now that many procedures cost roughly the price of a used car, industry commentators have lauded the “democratization” of beauty. Makeover shows of the past, which improved the appearance of the show’s participants with makeup and new haircuts, have been replaced with a new breed of reality shows that transform apparently ugly women into beauties with massive and invasive surgical procedures. Reality shows such as “I Want a Famous Face” have drastically upped the ante. Now we can actually look like the women on the film screens.

For most of us, our interactions with these images of ideal female beauty are deeply personal and individualized. As feminists, we do not engage with beauty images uncritically. But few of us are untouched. Not only must we wrestle with our low self-esteem because of our bad body image, but we also struggle with feelings of guilt that we actually care what people think about our appearance.

But the impact of these images is not only personal. The dictates of the beauty industry are connected to the social oppression of women. That old feminist slogan still rings true. The personal is political. It is time to call the beauty industry and the practices it advocates for what it is – a form of gendered violence and oppression.

BEAUTY AND OPPRESSION

Struggles with body image are tied to struggles over gender and what meaning is assigned to being male or female. Like race and class, concepts of gender are extremely powerful social forces. Although much has been done to complicate the male/female gender distinction, characteristics of “men” and “women” in popular culture have remained steadfastly narrow and predetermined. In other words, men are from Mars, women are from Venus, and our characteristics are determined by biology rather than by culture.

Limiting the meaning of gender to opposing categories of “male” and “female” has important material consequences. It implies that gender is a fixed thing rather than a dynamic social relation that is the site of ambiguity, creativ-



DOVE: Real women have real curves. Meet the women selected to join the Dove Firming campaign (www.campaignforrealbeauty.com).

ity, repression and contestation.

However, ideal “feminine” attributes shift and change over time, and it is not a coincidence that the very characteristics that are supposedly “feminine” are marshalled to justify and reproduce women’s inequality. For example, cultural stereotypes of women as nurturing and controlled by emotion rather than rationality have been relied upon to justify preventing women from owning property, having the vote, from attaining positions of power in the workplace and making them disproportionately responsible for housework and childrearing. Thus, cultural ideals of womanhood should be approached with suspicion.

The women’s movement of the 60s and 70s posed a major challenge to the laws,

*Cultural ideals of
beauty are about
proscribing behaviour,
not appearance.*

stereotypes and misogyny that kept many women in the home. The 1980s witnessed a major backlash against feminism that successfully turned the term “feminism” into a dirty word for many young women. Beauty ideals have been used in this backlash with great effect, portraying feminists as unattractive. The stereotype of the hairy, lipstick-hating feminist is a stern warning about the social costs and rejection that accompany challenging gender oppression.

WOMEN AS OBJECTS

However, while feminists are apparently doomed to a life of poor hygiene and loneliness, the roles depicted for women who meet the social ideal are not so rosy either. Virtually any mainstream magazine or television commercial shows women’s bodies being used to sell products such as cosmetics and clothing. But they are also used to sell products that bear no connection to women’s bodies, such as cars, food and electronics. The images of women that are used to sell, well, virtually anything, are sexualized, commodified and objectified. Most importantly, they are silent.

There is a clear link between the pres-

sure on women to appear a certain way and the pressure on women to act a certain way. The qualities that are considered beautiful in women act as symbols for desirable female behaviour. Cultural ideals of beauty are about prescribing behaviour, not appearance.

Media images are not themselves oppressive, nor is sexualization. However, the context is everything. In contexts where prescribed gender roles are attached to material realities that undermine women, the flood of media images that link women to these roles serves only to reinforce, never challenge, them.

Few ads show women engaged in action unless they are cleaning their homes. Some ads make use of only parts of women's bodies – notably not their brains. Women's mouths are either slightly open and suggestive, or simply covered. Mouths, apparently, are not for speaking. Women's bodies are for sex or for cleaning.

Even women who are shown in actions that demonstrate physical power and strength are undermined by overt reference to their sexuality and appearance. For example, a recent outdoor sports magazine, *Outside*, featured a story on women rock climbers. The cover photo was of a naked woman standing in front of a rock wall.

Shortly after the second Iraq war began, *Glamour*, one of the top selling women's beauty magazines in the US and Canada, published an article on makeovers for female US soldiers in combat. The spread included such handy tips as how to keep the desert sand out of your lipstick, and how to keep the sweat from ruining your makeup (waterproof mascara is apparently a must). I suppose every woman wants to look her best while torturing Iraqi prisoners – after all, you never know when someone is going to snap a picture. The message could not be clearer. Even as soldiers, one of the most powerfully violent masculine images possible, women are reduced to objects of beauty and desire.

Buying into beauty ideals has serious consequences. It ensures that women's value is determined by their appearance rather than on what women do, how they think, or even how they treat other people. Women of colour are automatically devalued, since cultural ideals of

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beauty exclude them from the start. Beauty ideals reward women who look good, say little and pose no challenge to male power and domination.

Striving for unattainable beauty ensures that women lack self confidence and a belief in their own value. There is something important at stake here. If you don't have confidence in yourself, how can you fight for gender equality and a better world? How can you believe that your political arguments or beliefs have value, when your value lies in how you appear?

The problem is not that women are neurotic, irrational and shallowly focused on their appearance. We live in a deeply sexist culture in which women are disempowered in their personal, work and political relationships. Images of beauty are a cultural expression of that disem-

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powerment, and play a role in its continuation by prescribing gender roles that devalue women.

REAL BEAUTY

Marxists have not paid much attention to the body and body image despite the fact that these issues are tied to systems of oppression and social control in our patriarchal and capitalist society. Given the wide-ranging impact that beauty ideals in popular culture have on women, we ignore such issues at our peril.

I do acknowledge that men are also, increasingly, targeted by the beauty industry. Men are viewed as a new and untapped market for cosmetic surgery, fashion, hair products and cosmetics. I anticipate that the mass marketing of beauty ideals for men will only intensify in the coming years. This has a different impact on men because they are not oppressed as a group in the same ways as women. However, like images directed at women, the images directed at men also reinforce strict gender roles in which men are social actors with power and women are dominated.

The fight for gender equality must, of course, focus on improving the conditions of women's work, accessible daycare and fighting violence against women, amongst other issues. These are key issues that require serious attention, analysis and activism. But beyond the material issues that prevent women from engaging as equal participants in society, we must not ignore the ideologies that justify that inequality. The ideology of beauty is one extremely powerful tool in the arsenal of gender oppression.

Therein lies the key problem with ad campaigns such as Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty". While the campaign attempts to broaden the definition of beauty, it does not pose any challenge to strict gender roles that place value on women's appearance above all else. It does nothing to break apart existing categories of gender that depend on strict divisions between what is male and what is female.

So, with the greatest respect to Dove, my campaign for real beauty is a campaign for gender equality and social justice. ★

BOOK REVIEW

Weaken the women, destabilize their nation

Sexual violence as a tool of colonization

*CONQUEST: SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND
AMERICAN INDIAN GENOCIDE*

BY ANDREA SMITH

PUBLISHED BY SOUTH END
PRESS, 2005
\$18.00 US

REVIEW BY ZOË AARDEN
AND DEBORAH SIMMONS

The history and consequences of colonization in North America are complex and multifaceted. Indeed, each culture and people affected by colonization brings another aspect to the story. In her book *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, Andrea Smith draws connections between the raping of Native women's bodies and the rape of Native lands and cultures. In so doing, she analyses the intersections of colonial gender, race and class and their impacts on Native peoples' lives, lands and cultures. Smith stresses the common experiences of Aboriginal oppression, focusing on examples from the United States and Canada. Her cross-border analysis extends to the experiences of Indigenous peoples globally and underlines the importance of solidarity in the struggle for self-determination.

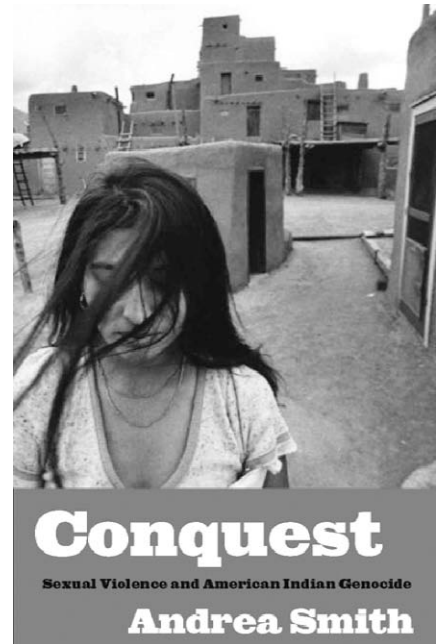
Smith uses the tools of gender analysis to explore the intersection of sexual violence and the colonization of Aboriginal peoples and lands. In her

view, gender oppression has been a core aspect of state-sanctioned genocide against Aboriginal peoples. The logic of gender oppression is connected to the logic justifying the forcible acculturation of Aboriginal children in residential schools, and the appropriation and 'rape' of Aboriginal lands in the name of profit.

Smith is in part inspired by Franz Fanon's reading of colonialism as a frame for racial and gender oppression. She argues that gender violence and racial oppression are ideologically linked to cultural mechanisms that reproduce specific colonial identities and norms that make the violence of the colonial system seem 'natural.' In her introductory chapter, Smith also draws from more recent theories of race and gender that tend to focus on the ideological or cultural aspects of oppression. She does mention the role of class and the capitalist system, but the material basis for oppression is weakly developed in her analysis.

Perhaps what sets this book apart is Smith's look at the issue of gender and racial oppression from the perspective of an activist. Smith is a co-founder of INCITE! Women of Colour Against Violence, one of the largest grassroots organizations for radical feminists of colour in the US. She has done work with Chicago's WARN (Women of All Red Nations), as well as initiatives such as the Boarding School Healing Project, the U.N. Conference Against Racism, and the NAWHERC conference on reproductive rights.

Conquest examines the relationship



between the violence of state institutions and experiences of interpersonal violence. Smith argues that a culture reliant upon dominance and intimidation for social cohesion will inevitably result in violence within interpersonal relationships. Through a series of thematic chapters, Smith demonstrates how people of colour, and Aboriginal peoples specifically, have been further victimized by the state through racist and sexist policies and surveillance structures that maintain control over every aspect of their lives. At the same time, she casts a critical eye on the "mainstream" organisations that have emerged to combat oppression and environmental destruction, and argues for a radical strategy for building resistance.

Smith's discussion of the residential and boarding school systems illustrates the process of dehumanization, intimidation, violence and servitude by which Canadian and American governments intended to create "good" Indians — compliant domestic servants. Like the earlier system of slavery in the United States, residential schools instilled in students ideas about gender that have acted like catalysts in the epidemic of violence against women in Aboriginal communities continuing into the present. Smith argues that the global struggle for financial reparations for residential school abuses and other human rights violations against Aboriginal peoples is an important part of the struggle for sovereignty and economic independence.

Zoë Aarden has a Master of Arts in Native Studies at Trent University and is an ongoing supporter of anticolonial activism. Deborah Simmons is a member of the New Socialist Group in Winnipeg.

In a chapter on the destruction of Aboriginal lands, Smith shows that it's a small step from dehumanizing Aboriginal people to colonizing and polluting their lands. Aboriginal lands are the last frontier for resource development, particularly in the north where petroleum development and mining threaten traditional subsistence resources. Aboriginal lands have become dumping grounds for chemical waste. Contaminants absorbed by women in traditional foods such as fish and caribou have a direct impact on their children.

Clearly, Aboriginal peoples have an interest in opposing ecological destruction on their lands. Nevertheless, mainstream environmentalists have supported racist population control strategies that blame the world's most vulnerable populations—those in the Global South and Aboriginal peoples—for the devastation of their environment. Mainstream environmentalists see Native sovereignty as a threat to preservation and sustainable management of resources. Smith terms this environmentalist racism “the greening of hate,” and describes how population control policies are an important instrument of genocide against Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal women, along with entire populations in the Global South, have been subject to forced and involuntary sterilization and potentially damaging birth control methods such as Depo Provera. Smith describes a case in the Northwest Territories where Aboriginal women seeking abortions were given the operations with no anaesthesia as punishment.

These examples express, furthermore, a view that sees the right of women to decide what happens to their own bodies as a privilege of the middle class only. Indeed, when the concept of reproductive choice is associated with poor women and women of colour, it suddenly loses its legitimacy. These women are portrayed as not having ‘earned’ the right to choose pregnancy. Quite the opposite: they are said to have a responsibility or obligation to the world to reduce their population growth. In this way, pro-choice language is twisted to advance a view oppressive of women in marginalized communities.

Smith points out that Aboriginal peoples have historically been used as

guinea pigs for dangerous medical experiments without appropriate procedures for informed consent. Furthermore, health care services on reserves have been underfunded and rendered substandard. And as the health, lands and culture of Aboriginal peoples have been under systematic attack, Aboriginal societies have simultaneously been mined for their knowledge and spirituality – not only by the New Age movement, but by academic institutions as well. This appropriated knowledge is taken out of context and often highly sexualized, reinforcing racial stereotypes about the ‘wild’ Indian. Indeed, Smith alleges that the misappropriation of Native knowledges threatens Native sovereignty itself.

Smith's critique of mainstream feminist and environmentalist organizations comes from her experience organizing with Native women at the grassroots level. Working within the logic of capitalism, the mainstream organisations tend to further the colonization and marginalization of those women and land-based peoples whose interests they are mandated to represent. Smith maintains accountability to people of colour first and foremost, constantly questioning mainstream ideas of ‘inclusion’ that are supposed to assist and protect people of colour but fail to address their specific communities' experiences of colonial violence and injustice.

Smith calls for an anti-colonial strategy that centrally addresses issues of gender violence. She consistently positions women of colour, and specifically Native women, at the centre of analysis and resistance. This contrasts with the mainstream model that positions the most empowered women in society at the centre — middle-class white women — and secondarily attempts to create a model of “inclusion” for everyone else. Neither can an anti-colonial strategy rely upon institutions of the state, since these institutions are themselves instruments of racist and gender violence. In particular, Smith describes numerous examples of racism in the criminal justice system, including three of the most high profile cases of police violence in Canada since 1998.

In her concluding chapter, Smith explores the implications of the new imperialism after 9/11 for struggles

against oppression. She shows how the external war against terror has translated into increased racism, sexism and heterosexism at home. In her words, “It is important to understand that this war against ‘terror’ is really an attack against Native sovereignty, and that consolidating U.S. empire abroad is predicated on consolidating US empire within US borders.” Empire is founded on a nationalism that promotes domestic resource extraction on Aboriginal lands, such as the petroleum drilling planned for Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge on Gwich'in territory; a militarism that supports military testing on Aboriginal lands, such as the 18,000 low-level NATO flights per year that have disrupted Innu lands in Labrador; an anti-immigrant ideology that reinforces the power of the state with respect to Aboriginal lands.

What is most remarkable is that *Conquest* provides practical, community-based methods for addressing racial and gender oppression. Ah, the offer of some kind of strategy! She opposes the separatism prevalent among Aboriginal activists, noting that this perspective neglects to challenge structures of oppression. Rather, Smith argues for a holistic coalition-building strategy that makes links among social justice movements. She looks to organising models that “make power and take power.” She points to a number of young women's organisations, such as Sista II Sista in Brooklyn, and Sisters in Action for Power in Portland, Oregon that exemplify this approach.

Conquest is important as a gathering of evidence about the state-sanctioned violation of Aboriginal rights in the United States and Canada, including violence against Aboriginal women and the theft and destruction of Aboriginal lands. Although Smith does not fully explain how this is rooted in capitalism and the drive for profit, her analysis does lead toward a revolutionary strategy. Smith concludes that the struggle for self-determination must involve “the project of creating a new world governed by an alternative system not based on domination, coercion and control.” This global vision is not utopian, but rather is grounded in the experience of resistance.★

We're not crazy!

The days of May and June in Bolivia

JEFFERY R. WEBBER was present during Bolivia's dramatic mass confrontations in May and June. In this article, Jeffery looks at the emergence of revolutionary democracy as well as the political confusion and the threats ahead.

Let's begin with some unpleasant facts. Bolivia is South America's poorest country. Within Latin America, only Nicaragua and Haiti suffer higher rates of poverty. According to the most recent statistics from the Bolivian government, almost 60 per cent of the population is "poor," with half of this sector "extremely poor." John Crabtree points out, "Only 16 per cent of the population is believed to have sufficient income to cover basic needs." How that doesn't signify an 84 per cent rate of poverty only the government and the World Bank could 'explain.'

Add to this the fact that inequality levels in Bolivia are among the highest in Latin America, which in turn is the most unequal region in the world. Still worse, much of the suffering from inequity and poverty in Bolivia correlates with being Indigenous, people who make up more than 60 per cent of the population.

Pernicious racism is hard to express through statistics. Sometimes anecdotes tell a fuller truth. Aymara intellectual Pablo Mamani Ramírez works at the Public University of El Alto. El Alto is a shantytown with a population probably in excess of 700,000. The shantytown overlooks the colonial valley city of La Paz. Over 80 per cent of *alteños* (residents of El Alto) self-identify as Indigenous. Mamani writes: "From within the spaces of power is imagined, is constructed, the city of El Alto as the Other City, the city of Indians. Relations

of ethnic discrimination are so strong so as to seem natural. One notes this in daily life, when listening to the radio waves: 'El Alto is a dirty and disorganized city.' It's also evident in the minibuses that transit between La Paz and El Alto, when 'distinguished' ladies and gentlemen use deodorant perfumes to try to erase the stench, and possibly the colour, of the rest of the passengers."

In May and June of 2005, Bolivia witnessed massive Left-Indigenous mobilizations once more, on a scale not seen since – and in some senses surpassing – the October 2003 "Gas War." That October, president Gonzalo "Goni" Sánchez de Lozada was thrown out of power. He was the personification of the neoliberal economic model first introduced in 1985. Carlos Mesa Gisbert was vice-president at the time and assumed office after Goni fled the country for exile in the United States. Mesa promised the masses in the streets that he would carry through with their "October Agenda" of nationalizing natural gas, convening a Constituent Assembly and ensuring a trial of Goni and his closest ring of hacks and gangsters.

Alas, Mesa was a gangster too. He wouldn't gun down unarmed civilians as Goni did in October 2003, but he refused any course but to be the lackey of local factions of the internationally oriented bourgeoisie, the international financial institutions, the United States embassy, petroleum transnational corpo-

rations and European and even Brazilian capitalists. And so, on June 6, 2005, the radicalized poor-indigenous threw him out, too. Peasants, miners, the urban unemployed, students, informal workers and Indigenous forces that transcend these sectors forced Mesa to resign as they joined together massively – if only for a moment – under the demand for complete nationalization of the hydrocarbons industry, the most important resource of which is natural gas.

I want to introduce three parts to this scenario: first, Goni and Mesa and their similarities that represent the class-ethnic forces from which they emerged; second, the days of May and June, and the strengths and limitations of the popular forces during this struggle; and third, the incipient tragedy of the Centre-Left exit strategy of the Movement Toward Socialism party (MAS), led by Evo Morales.

To introduce these parts it was necessary to begin with the broad brush of poverty, inequality and racism that permeate Bolivian reality. The mainstream media and the official political discourse throughout the country has sought to characterize the protesters as irrational – a deeply racist discourse that has profound historical roots in social Darwinism and the idea that Indigenous peoples can't think properly – and/or funded and manipulated by the dark forces of external narco-terrorist-communist infiltrators.

The truth, of course, is that in the setting described at the outset, the only dignified and rational thing to do is to tear this system down and create a new system of racial and economic equality. Readers of this magazine might call that socialism.

THE BOLIVIAN SUPER-ELITE AND NEOLIBERAL RATIONALITY

Former president Goni was a fair-skinned mining magnate, a multi-millionaire

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May 16th march from El Alto to La Paz.

amidst a sea of poverty who spoke broken Spanish after having been raised in the United States. He was a key founder of neoliberal economic restructuring. He represented the hyper-rich and the backwards colonial, racist condition of the Bolivian state. He was also willing to kill between 70 and 80 unarmed civilians to defend this order in September and October 2003, before the middle class – disgusted by innocent blood in the streets – abandoned his side. He was forced into exile in the United States.

Replacing Goni through constitutional channels was Carlos Mesa Gisbert, Goni's vice-president who had distanced himself publicly from Goni's butchering. Accepting Mesa's assumption of power illustrated the weak political depth of popular forces in the mobilizations of October 2003, despite their massive protest capacity. Mesa was an established neoliberal through and through. How could he be expected to carry through with the quite radical "October Agenda?"

By May and June 2005, the utter contempt that emerged for Mesa – born out of the president's unwillingness to carry through his mandate – was plain to see in the streets of the capital and throughout much of the country. But there was also a deepening sense of political consciousness. In meetings with miners, neighbours, peasants and so on, a common refrain was that it was not the man at the top of the system that was the problem, it was the system itself. Some

ventured further the capitalist system itself, the colonial-racist system had to be abolished.

Yet even if Mesa the individual represented little other than the system from which he emerged, it still teaches us something about that system to examine his words at a critical moment. After a particularly intense period of social mobilization and roadblocks earlier this year, Mesa went on television and announced his – what turned out to be revocable – resignation to the Bolivian people. He denounced Evo Morales (of the Movement Toward Socialism) for "blockading" the country and proposing irrational measures against foreign capital, especially in the hydrocarbons industry. Abel Mamani, leader of the Federation of United Neighbours of El Alto (FEJUVE-El Alto) came under the same vicious attack.

The fact that Mesa's speech infantilized Morales and Mamani, and that Morales and Mamani are both Aymara, touched on the racist currents of the Bolivian situation as well. But the important axis of the speech reflects what Forrest Hylton describes as the conflict between conceptions of democracy: radical democracy versus (neo)liberal democracy; whether people rule their lives or whether capital rules their lives.

"Brazil has told us, Spain has told us," Mesa pleaded that evening, "the World Bank, the United States, the International Monetary Fund, Great

Britain and all of the European Union: Bolivians, approve a law [on hydrocarbons] that is viable and acceptable to the International Community." The needs of international capital, not those of the 84 per cent of Bolivians who can't meet their basic needs, according to Mesa, determine what is "viable and acceptable." Mesa repeated *ad nauseam* in his address how the parameters of the possible were set by the "international community," and therefore it was irrational to propose alternatives.

Recently at a lecture in La Paz called "The Colonial President," Leftist political philosopher Luis Tapia wondered about the implications of Mesa's televised appearance that night. It is impossible to determine the economic policies of your country. They are determined by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the interests of international capital. So Mesa says to the popular forces demanding social justice in the streets and countryside, "Don't even think about it, don't be irrational." Tapia wondered, then, if to be rational meant to give up thinking.

THE RATIONALITY OF REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRACY

The mobilizations of May-June are particularly significant for four reasons: (i) they were national in scope, even if the most intense confrontations and concentrations of people were found in La Paz-El Alto; (ii) the demand around which all the innumerable popular sectors and organizations mobilized was the nationalization of gas; (iii) because of the failure of the popular Indigenous-Left forces to lay the foundations for an alternative basis of revolutionary power, the Right has maintained – even if in perpetual crisis – its grip on state power and is looking to rearticulate itself forcefully in the December elections this year; and (iv) there has been a decisive increase in the political consciousness of many social movement actors evident in the fact that at every meeting, assembly and march, the theme of popular power, of taking power, is on everyone's lips, even if its realization remains a relatively distant hope.

The most critically important popular organization in the articulation of the nationalization demand was clearly FEJUVE-El Alto. The idea was first

powerfully brought to life in the Gas War of September-October 2003, but had become somewhat diluted, faded and confused after Mesa's manipulative gas referendum of July 2004 effectively demobilized many social movements. It was FEJUVE-El Alto, in the organization's 2004 Congress, that approved as part of its new mandate the struggle to nationalize gas. And it was FEJUVE-El Alto that formulated the idea of a massive mobilization for this demand in the months leading up to the days of May and June. They inaugurated the struggle with an incredible march from El Alto to La Paz on May 16. FEJUVE-El Alto was joined by numerous other radical popular forces on this impressive day which set in motion the general strike that would last over three weeks. Despite the fact that on the same day the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party initiated a march of a separate coalition of forces calling for only 50 per cent royalties in a new hydrocarbons law, FEJUVE's demand for nationalization became the demand of the countryside and the streets in the weeks following.

FEJUVE-El Alto forged the nationalization consensus, shut off access to gasoline and natural gas to La Paz through the barricading of the Senkata plant in El Alto, and drove La Paz into a more generalized state of scarcity (in basic food products, etc.) through a three-week long general strike and the blockading of road access to the capital.

Meanwhile, in the intense street struggles in La Paz, the protagonists in descending order of importance were the Federation of Peasant Workers of La Paz ("Tupaj Katari" led by Aymara revolutionary Gualberto Choque), the Federation of Bolivian Miners (FSTMB), and student radicals from the Public University of El Alto.

Again, though, the struggle was national. All nine regions of the country experienced effective roadblocks of the major highway arteries. Even the historically less politicized and radicalized Indigenous movements in the Eastern lowlands (due to their origins in non-governmental organizations) occupied oil and natural gas well-heads in support of the struggle.

June 6 witnessed somewhere between 300,000 and 500,000 people in the



streets of La Paz. Standing in the centre of downtown, I saw nothing but waves of dignified, poor-Indigenous revolutionaries in every direction stretching out to the horizons of the city streets. It is impossible to convey the weight of this assembly of radicalized people. Mesa sensed the end and announced his resignation – which would then have to be approved by Congress. This was an extraordinary popular victory, but events that followed revealed the weaknesses in the revolutionary forces.

CENTRE-LEFT MYOPIA, AND THE RIGHT WING THREAT

Next in line for the presidency, according to the constitution, was president of the Senate Hormando Vaca Díez, a hated Right-winger from Santa Cruz. If he did not assume power, it would be Mario Cossío, president of the lower house of Congress, who could take over the reigns of the country constitutionally. He is a member of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) which is Goni's old party. The special session of Congress to decide on the post-Mesa situation was held in Sucre rather than La Paz in an attempt to avoid protesters. Vaca Díez was maneuvering to take power.

The revolutionary miners wouldn't have it, however, and spontaneously set-off to Sucre to shut the place down if Vaca Díez assumed the presidency. A miner was killed in confrontations that followed, but the second popular victory of May and June – even if limited and defensive – was won as both Vaca Díez and Cossío were forced to refuse power and allow Supreme Court president Eduardo Rodríguez to take over the pres-

idency with the assumption that elections would be pushed forward to December of this year. After a few weeks of confusion in Congress, this is precisely what was decided in early July.

A new phase of this historic struggle has begun with the focus on elections bringing its weight to bear on social movement and political party strategies. The MAS and its leader Evo Morales quickly decided to further align their political trajectory with that of Brazilian President Lula and his neoliberal orientation since taking office. Morales has been having intense conversations with the mayor of La Paz and leader of the Movement Without Fear party, Juan Del Granado. They are discussing forming a united front electoral bloc against neoliberalism. The only catch is they don't appear to be against it. Granado, a fervent devotee of Mesa, was a clear opponent of the popular struggle earlier this year in El Alto to kick out the private water company Aguas del Illimani and to establish a public water system under popular social control.

There is confusion and division among popular Left-Indigenous forces, but no illusions that the MAS-MSM spectacle is any path forward. Discussions of a National Aboriginal Popular Assembly with a clear revolutionary flavour are beginning to take root, but are still in their incipient stages. A longer-term plan to construct a revolutionary political school in El Alto is gaining excitement and momentum, but won't be part of any necessary resistance to a Right-wing electoral re-articulation in December. The trajectory of the revolution is muddy and contingent on a thousand factors, but the people are not through fighting. ★

ZAPATISTA TURN

One Step Forward ...

BY PHIL HEARSE

The Chiapas Red Alert called by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in mid-June set alarm bells ringing among the Left and social movements in Latin America and beyond. The alert turned out to be a precautionary security measure, as the clandestine committee that leads the Zapatistas called the army, its political cadres and the leaders of the Chiapas autonomous municipalities to a “consulta” – in effect a full-scale congress of the movement – to discuss a major political turn.

The outcome was a huge majority in favour of the “Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacondona,” which sets the movement on a new course of trying to build unity with other sections of the Left and global justice movement in Mexico and internationally. To that end the EZLN intends to send a delegation to all parts of Mexico to engage in a broad-scale dialogue, with the aim of trying to forge a movement “for a programme of the left and a new constitution.”

What lies behind this new turn by the EZLN and what will its proposals mean?

Above all, the turn is designed to get the Zapatista movement out of its political isolation that has led it into an impasse. To better understand that, we have to look at what has happened to the movement in the last eight years.

BACKGROUND TO THE TURN

Between March and July of 1997, there were many murders, kidnappings, detentions, tortures and beatings in the civilian communities of the Zapatistas in the state of Chiapas. On December 22, 1997, a paramilitary group raided the



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town of Acteal, largely populated by Zapatista sympathisers. In this incident 45 unarmed people were massacred. Nine of the victims were men, 21 were women and 15 were children. The worst part about this massacre was that it was carried out by troops who had been recruited by the military from that area.

The Mexican government used the Acteal massacre as an excuse to heighten militarization in Chiapas. On April 11 and May 1 of 1998, the Mexican government sent troops to violently dismantle two of the 38 Zapatista autonomous zones. After these events, the Governor of Chiapas Roberto Albores Guillen stated, “I will finish off the autonomous municipalities.”

The EZLN itself, deep in the jungle, was unable to reach the villages quickly enough to prevent several dozen murders, rapes, beatings, the destruction of crops and the theft of campesinos’ money.

After a period of silence, in 1999 the

EZLN signalled a political offensive to defeat the military attacks; Sub-commandate Marcos published his famous text “Masks and Silences” which called on the Mexican Left and “civil society” to defend the Zapatistas. The EZLN launched a nation-wide referendum for basic social change, and over a thousand Zapatistas toured the country. Marcos himself addressed crowds in Mexico City. The scene seemed set for a new dialogue with the incoming government of the National Action Party (PAN) and President Vicente Fox, elected in 2000.

Despite election promises, the Fox government refused to implement the provisions of the San Andreas accords, which had promised the Zapatista communities autonomy and land rights. The villages remain penned in by the militarization of the area, and conflict with state authorities is frequent. Some of the Chiapas mountain communities are loyal to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which ruled Mexico for more than 70 years in the twentieth

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century, and they form the support base for Right-wing paramilitary groups, a source of constant harassment and fear for the Zapatista municipalities.

As a consequence of the Fox government's refusal to negotiate the Zapatistas pulled back. Despairing of a political breakthrough, the EZLN leadership decided to concentrate on political and military reorganization and improving the lives of the Zapatista base communities.

The EZLN leadership has progressively tried to hand decision-making over to the local level, encouraging the autonomous municipalities and "good government juntas" to take the reigns of decision-making. According to Marcos, the last few years have also involved an effort to develop a new generation of political cadres.

Self-organization and egalitarian principles, as well as a considerable effort by Mexican and international NGOs, some of whom have permanent workers in the area, have achieved significant improvements in the health, education and nutrition of local people.

This social and political progress of course does not amount to solving the basic problems of the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas, which have their roots in poverty and lack of democracy at an all-Mexico level, although historically these things have hit the oppressed Indigenous communities particularly hard.

ZAPATISTAS AND LEFT RENEWAL

In fact, the Zapatista movement has always recognised that its objectives can only be achieved at an all-Mexico level, and indeed that the EZLN struggle is part of the international fight against neoliberal capitalism. However, the position of Marcos and the EZLN leadership in relation to the fight for a reconstituted and united Mexican Left has been very mixed, if not broadly negative.

In 1995, the Zapatistas took the initiative to form the nation-wide Zapatista Front (FZLN), which rapidly attracted many organised leftists as well as individuals. This could have become the basis for a new broad Left party. But in the end, the EZLN leadership vetoed such a development.

In a letter about the Sixth Declaration, Marcos hints that this was because the



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EZLN had promised it base communities that the movement would always be of the Indigenous peoples and for the Indigenous peoples, not something broader that could lose its focus on their needs and demands. Some commentators say Marcos feared losing control of the movement.

Whatever the reason, the refusal to turn the FZLN into a broad Left party-type formation sounded its rapid death-knell as an effective political force. It survives as a "Zapatista solidarity campaign," without much in the way of members or influence.

Mexican civil society has mobilized periodically to defend the Zapatistas, but it does not need the FZLN to do so. On the contrary, as always, the fundamental loyalty of leftist activists and sympathisers will be to political organizations that put forward an overall and more-or-less coherent global political alternative. The tightly-controlled FZLN can never be that.

Some have argued that providing Mexico-wide Left political leadership is not the responsibility of the Zapatistas, who in any case will find it very difficult to provide this from a small and isolated corner of the country. In a 1999 interview, Jaime Gonzalez of the Socialist Unity League (LUS) said of the Zapatistas:

"Now, how is it that this enormously popular movement has not been able to sustain any of its more general political initiatives? In my opinion the answer is simple: they do not have a clear strategy

to win. They don't know what to do with the elections and they don't have the slightest idea of a programme for the rest of Mexico. And let me say, that's not their responsibility. How can an Indigenous uprising in one corner of southern Mexico have an elaborated programme for the whole of Mexican society? For the people in the north, for the economy, for an anti-capitalist transition? You could say it like this: the Zapatistas pose problems which they are inherently incapable of solving themselves."

Gonzalez's comments contain a hint of self-contradiction. If the Zapatistas are such an enormously popular movement, they do have the potential to begin to give overall political leadership to the Mexican Left, at least in cooperation with others. This would take will and political vision, both in terms of goals and strategy but also sensible tactics for unity.

From 1998 to 2000, the EZLN played a very active political role, part of its political counter-offensive against the government, in giving all-out political support to the student strikers at Mexico City's giant university UNAM (100,000 students), in the struggle against the imposition of student fees. They refused to give up 100 percent support for the UNAM strikers, even when it became clear the students' ultra-left leadership was leading the struggle to defeat.

In addition, for the first time, masked Zapatistas participated in Mexico City demonstrations – that of the SME union electricity workers, battling to defeat privatization, and in the 1999 May Day

march. These initiatives seemed to indicate a willingness to take on a broader political role, but this was never followed up after the failure of the Fox government to rekindle the peace process started by the San Andreas accords.

THE PROBLEM OF THE PRD

Building a new broad anti-capitalist party would be tremendously important in the Mexican context because of the complete dominance of the Left by the centre-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). A late-1980s split from the PRI, the PRD sucked in the Communist Party. Its pressure indirectly helped to capsize the main Trotskyist organization, the PRT, in the early 1990s. The PRT had developed especially through its electoral campaigns, which were marginalized when the PRD took the electoral space to the left of the ruling PRI. The PRD is nostalgic for the old nationalist-corporatist traditions of the PRI in the 1930s and 1940s, and was formed in opposition to the slide by the PRI into pro-US neoliberalism under ex-president Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

Over the years, the PRD had drifted rightwards. There is little hint of anything resembling a radical Left within it. It remains a huge obstacle to any socialist or anti-capitalist representation of the workers, peasants and Indigenous people. Only the Zapatistas have the popularity to be the driving force for the construction of an alternative. The main problem with the PRD – a very familiar one – is that, despite drifting to the right and being recently caught up in a major

million through the streets of Mexico City. But the dominance of the PRD on the Left cannot be defeated without building a credible alternative.

How should we assess this new turn, in terms of the task of building a nationwide left alternative? The recent Sixth Declaration says:

“We are going to go to listen to, and talk directly with, without intermediaries or mediation, the simple and humble of the Mexican people, and, according to what we hear and learn, we are going to go about building, along with those people who, like us, are humble and simple, a national program of struggle, but a program which will be clearly of the left, or anti-capitalist, or anti-neoliberal, or for justice, democracy and liberty for the Mexican people.”

POLICY OF ALLIANCES

So far, so good. The text continues:

“We are also letting you know that the EZLN will establish a policy of alliances with non-electoral organizations and movements which define themselves, in theory and practice, as being of the left, in accordance with the following conditions: Not to make agreements from above to be imposed below, but to make accords to go together to listen and to organize outrage.

“Not to raise movements which are later negotiated behind the backs of those who made them, but to always take into account the opinions of those participating. Not to seek gifts, positions, advantages, public positions, from the Power or those who aspire to it, but to go beyond

ways of organizing, for their internal decision making processes, for their legitimate representations. And yes to a clear commitment for joint and co-ordinated defence of national sovereignty, with intransigent opposition to privatization attempts of electricity, oil, water and natural resources.

“In other words, we are inviting the unregistered political and social organizations of the left, and those persons who lay claim to the left and who do not belong to registered political parties, to meet with us, at the time, place and manner in which we shall propose at the proper time, to organize a national campaign, visiting all possible corners of our Patria, in order to listen to and organize the word of our people. It is like a campaign, then, but very otherly, because it is not electoral.”

This contains a lot that is very sensible, and it represents a new giant and exciting opportunity for the Mexican Left. Even if the objective were explicitly to build a new Left party-type organization, it would be sensible to start building it from the bottom-up, by dialogue, alliances and consultation, and not by artificial diktat from above.

AMBIGUITY

However, in Marcos’s discourse, and that of his main advisors like former Trotskyist leader Sergio Rodríguez Lascano, there is a constant ambiguity about the notion of parties, programmes and strategy. This revolves around the question of “changing the world without taking power.” Should the Left fight for the workers, peasants and Indigenous people to form their own national government? Are all parties inherently corrupt and manipulative, just because of the party form? Is all participation in elections to be deplored and must the Left be anti-electoral in principle?

If the EZLN proceeds by building alliances from below, but refuses to build a national political organization and refuses to countenance any electoral challenge from the Left, it will cede major political space to the PRD and the right-wing, fail in its objectives and lose another major opportunity.

This is a political turn that could revitalise the Left, or it could crumble into nothing. ★

The Zapatista turn creates a new giant and exciting opportunity for the Mexican left.

corruption scandal, at an electoral level it is the only credible alternative to the two right-wing parties, PRI and PAN.

The PRD’s candidate for president in 2006, the highly popular Mañuel Lopez Obrador, was the victim of an attempt by the PRI and the PAN to disqualify him because of the PRD’s corruption scandal, a move defeated by a silent march of two

the election calendar. Not to try to resolve from above the problems of our Nation, but to build from below and for below an alternative to neoliberal destruction, an alternative of the left for Mexico.

“Yes to reciprocal respect for the autonomy and independence of organizations, for their methods of struggle, for their

VENEZUELA

Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution



Venezuelans demonstrate in support of Chavez (www.internationalviewpoint.com)

It may be easier to understand the Venezuelan process if we place it in the context of Latin America in particular and the world in general.

At present, there is a world neoliberal offensive of the imperialist financial bourgeoisie to snatch away from the workers the political and economic rights they conquered during the post-Second World War “Golden Years” of capitalism. The application of neoliberal policies has different effects whether it is carried out in Europe and the USA, or in Latin America. In the former two, it has meant, among other things, the loss of workers’ rights and the growth of unemployment. In Latin America, it has meant the pauperization and near starvation of large sectors of the population. To give but one example, in Argentina, a working class child of five is only as tall as a middle class child of three – and the statistics say nothing about the effects of malnutrition on mental development.

But this globalized offensive has had to

face the resistance of the world masses. That is why imperialism has developed methods to impose the application of neoliberal measures: the exertion of political and economic pressure on governments, militarism and the mechanisms of formal democracy. The first is most evident in the policies of international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The last two are more subtle.

When one thinks about imperialist militarism, Iraq comes immediately to mind. However, the US has for some time been taking steps in the process of re-colonization of Latin America via the militarization of the region. “Plan Colombia” and the continued attempts to force the parliaments of Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina to allow American troops in their territories, who will not be subject to the laws of the country, are but a few examples.

However, imperialism’s preferred way

VIRGINIA DE LA SIEGA

examines the gains of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela and asks whether it will deepen toward a socialist revolution.

to save capitalist regimes throughout the world is the use of the mechanisms of formal democracy. In Latin America, formal democracy has come to replace the savage dictatorships which different American administrations held in power up to the 1980s. Latin American workers, just as the workers of the First World, now have the “right” to periodically vote for governments that will act against their interests, regardless of their needs or demands. However, the function of formal democracy in Latin America is different.

The brutal application of neoliberal policies has repeatedly triggered uprisings – in Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina and Peru – which have ended in the overthrow of hated governments. However, these masses who have managed to organize themselves into committees and battalions to fight against the police and the army, have not yet been able to create an independent political force. Consequently, the potentially revolutionary processes of the last five years have all been channeled into the trap of formal democracy, and power has been given to “new” bourgeois governments, which have betrayed the hopes of the people. Until a new political alternative is built, the Latin American masses will continue to vote for governments that will betray their hopes. Argentina, Ecuador and Bolivia are good examples of this.

Venezuela, under its President Hugo Chávez, stands out as an exception to the rule.

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THE HISTORY OF THE PROCESS

The revolutionary process in Venezuela began in 1989, when President Carlos Andrés Pérez took the decision to apply the neoliberal measures demanded by the IMF. The consequence was the social uprising known as the “Caracazo”: the masses took to the streets; Pérez gave the army the order to shoot; 3000 people were killed.

The cycle of resistance to neoliberalism opened by the “Caracazo” continues not only in Venezuela but – in different degrees – on a continental scale in the whole of Latin America.

In 1992, Chávez led a coup d'état against the rampant corruption of the government. He failed, but the masses began to look at him as an alternative to the general atmosphere of dishonesty, bribery and general corruption of the Venezuelan ruling class, which had absolutely sold out to American imperialism. Six years later, in 1998, with an electoral campaign centered on the denunciation of the corruption of the regime, Chávez became president with almost 60 per cent of the vote.

The economic situation of the country during Chávez's first years in government was catastrophic. A central problem was the low price of oil on the world market. He was not in a position to carry out

state in the region. In November 2001, the process continued with the adoption of 49 decrees establishing that the oil, land, fish and other sectors of the economy are part of the wealth of the Venezuelan nation, rather than areas for the private accumulation of wealth.

Neither the Venezuelan bourgeoisie nor American imperialism was going to allow this. The US was not going to consent to any assertion of national independence at a time when they were interested in submitting the whole of Latin America to the conditions set by the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas), another attempt of the US state to reinforce its domination over the whole of Latin America. The Venezuelan bourgeoisie has historically been unwilling to grant even a minimum of social rights, such as access to education to the poor.

Bourgeois hatred in Venezuela is rooted in race as well as class. Class division, in many countries in Latin America, follows racial lines, with a “white” bourgeoisie descendant of the old colonial elites and European immigration, and the masses of Indigenous, Blacks and mixed-race people who fill the camp of the workers and the poor. This class-cum-race division is clearly seen in the demonstrations for and against Chávez. In the former are the Blacks, the mixed-race people of colour and the Indigenous who

they needed to get organized, the Venezuelan masses took to the streets in defence of Chávez. On seeing this, the army – which in Venezuela is seen by many of the poor as a means to social progress – abandoned the coup plotters. The coup was defeated, and Chávez found himself once again in power.

MASSES TO THE RESCUE

Between December 2002 and the beginning of February 2003, the bourgeoisie and the corrupt, pro-imperialist trade union bureaucracy of the oil workers, tried to prevent the production of oil to bring the government down to its knees. Once again, the mobilized masses and the rank-and-file oil workers – breaking away from their union – came to the defense of their government and the lock-out was defeated.

The only weapon left to the American government and the Venezuelan bourgeoisie was formal democracy. In 2004, they demanded a plebiscite. Chávez accepted the challenge and promised to resign if he lost it.

Once more, the Venezuelan masses came to the rescue. Under the slogan “They will not come back!”, the campaign committees organized electoral battalions subdivided into cells of ten people called electoral patrols. This form of organization replaced the traditional Bolivarian circles and allowed millions of sympathizers to take part in political discussion. It was the patrols that finally guaranteed the presence of thousands of voters in a country where abstentionism was the rule.

The political axis of the campaign launched by the patrols and the battalions was fundamentally anti-imperialist: Down with Bush and his government! Down with neoliberalism! Down with the political and economic caste that had ruled Venezuela until then! For Latin American integration!

Their victory was not only the victory of the people of Venezuela. The mobilized masses of Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina considered it their own victory.

The Venezuelan experience has another element which should be underlined: the self-organization of the masses and the workers. While it would be an exaggeration to talk about dual power in Venezuela, it is true that the confronta-

While it would be an exaggeration to talk about dual power in Venezuela, it is true that the confrontations against the bourgeoisie and imperialism have raised the consciousness and the level of organization of the Venezuelan masses.

reforms that implied a direct attack against the interests of the national and the international bourgeoisies.

Instead, he very quickly put into practice a program for the democratization of state institutions. Two months after taking power he called for a constituent assembly. The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, passed in 1999, transformed the Venezuelan state into the most democratic bourgeois

see Chávez as one of their own. In the latter are the well-dressed, white middle and upper classes of Venezuela.

In April 2002, with the help of American imperialism, the Venezuelan bourgeoisie launched a military coup which overthrew Chávez and sent him to prison. The American and the Spanish governments were the first to positively greet this breach of the constitutional order. Forty-seven hours later, the time



Lula and Chavez represent contrasting responses to imperialism.

tions against the bourgeoisie and imperialism have raised the consciousness and the level of organization of the Venezuelan masses.

In this sense, the success of the government “missions” that operate in the fields of education, health, housing, etc., would not have been possible without the existence of neighborhood committees, which group together local militants by the hundreds. These committees, which are not centralized, played a very important role in the mobilizations that put Chávez back in power, and then in the electoral “commandos” that were the key to the victory of the NO in the referendum.

WORKERS’ SELF-ORGANIZATION

However, it is the creation of the UNT (National Union of Workers) that can be considered one of the most important attempts at workers’ self-organization of this period. After decades of being ruled by the corrupt, pro-bourgeois bureaucracy of the CTV (Confederation of Workers of Venezuela), the Venezuelan workers now have an independent workers’ organization, within which revolutionary Marxists play a key role. The UNT continues to grow among the new and most combative sectors of workers, but the counter-offensive against the CTV has started. The bureaucrats have now made an attempt to impose a new “official” trade union central with obligatory membership and dues collected directly from the workers’ salaries, transforming the workers’ organization into one more government body.

The UNT has lead important workers’

struggles. Some of them have followed the traditional pattern (better working conditions, salary increase) but others, much more radicalized, pose the question of who should manage the work place. An example of this is Venepal, the main paper mill in the country, whose owners had declared bankruptcy. After a three-month strike, the mill was nationalized under workers’ control. This victory led to new struggles in which the defense of jobs is combined with attacks against the owners, who supported the coup and then sabotaged the country’s economy. A number of closed factories have been taken over and put to work by the workers in the form of co-operatives, while, in the public sector, the demand of “co-management” – in fact of some sort of control – has also been raised.

On July 9, left wing groups and parties of Venezuela (OIR, OCT, Trabajadores al Poder, “Activate” [a university youth movement]), the journal *Verdad Obrera Sindical* and independent activists got together to create the National Committee for the Building of a Workers’ Party for the Socialist Revolution. This committee will have as its task the discussion of the manifesto and program of the party, with the purpose of holding the founding congress of a new party in January 2006 during the World Social Forum in Caracas. Up to then, they will adopt the name UNIR (Union of the Revolutionary Left).

So, what about the Bolivarian Revolution?

What about Chávez’s contradictions?

Chávez is a consistently bourgeois

nationalist president of a semi-colony, who has managed to stop the privatization of Venezuelan oil – the main objective of American imperialism and of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie – who has come to the aid of Cuba, and who is also trying to build a network with various Latin American governments of the continent so as to negotiate better conditions within an imperialist order. It is not to diminish what he has done to say that he is not for a socialist revolution. When Chávez called a constituent assembly and institutionalized the right of the Venezuelan people to profit from the exploitation of their country’s wealth through social benefits and education, he started a colossal democratic revolution in Venezuela. This is why the centres of world power consider “chavismo” a bad example for the region and want it to be eliminated.

Chávez faces a historic alternative. He can base himself on the strength of the Venezuelan masses and go down the road of reforms that open the way to a real revolution. Or, he can follow the example of others like Peron in Argentina, Goulart in Brazil or Allende in Chile, and, by negotiating with imperialism for the sake of “not shedding the blood of brothers,” make the process that opened the Bolivarian Revolution end in a new disappointment for the Latin American masses.

EXTERNAL DANGER

There is also an external danger. After the experience of the referendum, it is clear to both the American government and the Venezuelan bourgeoisie, that they cannot get rid of Chávez by means of a coup or through the democratic process. That is why the possibility of an attempt at assassination or even military intervention justified as “pre-emptive” action cannot be ruled out. In this sense, talk of Chávez’s support of Colombian guerrillas represents ideal pretext. The kidnapping of Rodrigo Granda, a leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), in Venezuelan territory can be considered a sample of what is to come.

This puts to the fore the need of an international solidarity campaign with the people of Venezuela to prevent any imperialist aggression.★

Reconstruction by the rich

BY KSHAMA RANAWANA

On the south-eastern side of the island of Sri Lanka lies Arugam Bay, its pristine beaches famous for the warm, clean waters of the Indian Ocean that rise perfectly to make it one of the best places in the world to surf. A few years ago, it was the venue for the World Surfing Championship of Champions.

But when on December 26, 2004, the tectonic plates moved near Indonesia, the resultant raging tsunami swept away hundreds of small homes that had housed fishing families for generations on this beach.

This is a tale that was repeated in many parts of Sri Lanka and the rest of tsunami-affected South Asia. The tsunami took the lives of more than 30,000 people, displaced a million, robbed nearly 275,000 of their livelihoods and destroyed about two-thirds of the southern and eastern coast of the country. Many of those who lost everything – including their families – in the disaster were subsistence fishers eking out an existence from the sea.

The tragedy of these people, paraded across the television screens of the world, struck a chord in millions. Billions of dollars in aid were pledged, though now, seven months later, reconstruction and resettlement efforts don't seem to match the monies received. Instead, there are ominous signs that the entrenched political powers in the country are using reconstruction as an opportunity to enhance their wealth and power.

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The tsunami has become a bonanza for the government and wealthy developers. But who speaks for the poor?

MISFORTUNE FOR MANY, OPPORTUNITY FOR A FEW

As Sarath Fernando of the Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform in Sri Lanka says, the tsunami “is a misfortune for the poor, but a bonanza for the government and the powerful.” The Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation, made up of ten well-known businessmen, stakeholders in the country's tourism and construction industry, was appointed by the country's President, Chandrika Kumaratunge, within two weeks of December 26. Grassroots activists and experts in fisheries and coastal conservation, who would have ensured that the needs of the people and ecological safeguards were met, have been left out.

What was even more surprising, given the government's notoriety for sluggishness and the scope of devastation, was the announcement less than a month later of a master plan to rebuild the country.

A close scrutiny of this master plan is enlightening. It is a rehashing of previous attempts by successive governments of both the Right and the Left to privatize state-run industries and boost tourism. The United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party along with coalition allies have alternately governed the country since its independence from Britain in 1948. Over the past couple of decades, both parties have introduced strikingly similar “poverty alleviation” strategies, authored according to World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) requirements.

Implementation of these proposals was blocked only through the strong opposition of civil society groups and minority political parties that feared ecological

disasters and a further encroachment of the rights of poorer people.

Included in the tsunami recovery plan are these same proposals – an expressway along the southern coastal belt, the construction of nine new harbours, industrialized fishing areas, tourist resort zones, ultra-modern housing and townships, a coal-fired power plant and a hydroelectricity scheme – which have been the highlights of similar “development” plans presented to the Sri Lankan public time and time again. Not quite what the struggling survivors of the tsunami require.

TOURISM INDUSTRY LAND GRAB

But the most blatant act of the tourism-industry cartel is the grab of priceless beach property. Citing security concerns, in the wake of December 2004 the government imposed a “buffer zone” of 100 metres for the southern and western coasts and a 200-metre area for the eastern coast. What this means is that all people who have for countless generations lived on these beaches must move further inland, jeopardizing their traditional livelihoods.

While the government assures displaced beach-dwellers that they can retain ownership titles to their lands, they are not permitted to use the land for construction. Instead they must relocate to the tourism zones demarcated by the government and the Tourist Board.

A government advertisement in February stated that reconstruction of coastal buildings at the same location would be permitted if the cost of repair was less than 40 per cent of the total value of replacement. There would be no permission granted for the reconstruction

of buildings that had suffered greater damage. The only buildings that could be built or rebuilt were those for which the relevant authorities, including the Tourist Board, had granted approval prior to the tsunami.

What this means is that, while high-end hotels could be built or reconstructed on prime beach land, the comparatively flimsy wattle-and-daub (clay and wood) or single-brick wall houses of the fisher folk and other small guest-houses will not meet the specifications of the government edict.

Obviously then, the politically well-connected high-end tourism industry will have a free-run of the island's famous beaches with no hindrance from the pesky fisher-folk and other beach-dwellers they have been trying to get rid of for years.

Predictably, the post-tsunami reconstruction plan has a blueprint for the construction of 15 tourist resorts including a marina, helipads, seaplane landing strips and US\$300-a-night chalets. A Tourist Board official has been quoted telling Arugam Bay's residents that the board is targeting "the high-level tourist and not the five-dollar ones."

In a bid to recapture the tourism industry, a massive international media campaign and a budget of US\$5.3 million has been set aside under the tourist marketing recovery program. What's more, hotels under reconstruction have been granted an import duty waiver for hotel refurbishment, loans of up to US\$1 million with no repayment in the first year, and replacement of "tourism-related" vehicles.

HOUSING CRISIS

In contrast, there is a value added tax on building materials, which inflates the cost of building houses for those displaced by both the tsunami and the 20-year-long ethnic war in the country, which has led to more than 300,000 people living in temporary shelter these past 15 years.

In March of this year, the government released the assistance policy and implementation guidelines on housing and township development, which states that grants would be available for the reconstruction of houses. However, a family receiving such a grant is expected to complete the building within six months. While the time frame would ensure the money would not be misused, concerns have been raised by the Women's

Coalition for Disaster Management, Batticaloa, that the shortage of skilled labour and vulnerability of female-headed households may result in such households being unable to meet the specified deadlines.

Arrangements have also been made for mortgages to be taken out by those who require additional finances to complete their homes. Here again, the criteria for eligibility remains the same as it is for those not affected by the tsunami: final repayment of the loan within 20 years. This effectively cuts off those 45 years of age or older from taking advantage of the mortgage program. Clearly, these criteria are based not on people's need for housing but lenders' demands for repayment.

Of a total of US\$400 million earmarked for housing and township building, US\$20 million has been allocated for temporary shelter, and US \$80 million for houses for fisher folk. The balance will go toward building townships with modern infrastructure, located several kilometres away from the beaches. Interestingly, despite the aid that has flowed in, reconstruction of homes has been taken on by local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

YOUNG GIRL STANDS AMONG THE WRECKAGE OF A HOSPITAL IN KATTUNKUDI



Frustrated by the bureaucratic red tape and slow pace of the government, some NGOs have even resorted to purchasing land for the victims.

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse's riding of Hambantota in southern Sri Lanka was where in January the government chose, amidst much fanfare, to begin the reconstruction process. Of the 5000 home model township proposed, only 47 have so far been completed, but with no water or electricity.

Meanwhile, heavy customs duties are imposed on items reaching the country as aid. This results in goods lying awaiting clearance in port. Oxfam was recently required to cough up \$1 million as import duty for 25 SUVs brought in to help with work in tsunami-ravaged rural Sri Lanka.

GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION PARTIES' PRIORITIES ELSEWHERE

In May, the government convened the Sri Lanka Development Forum, made up of representatives of donor countries, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, the IMF and UN agencies, and received pledges totalling \$3 billion. Left out of the meeting were representatives of many NGOs, which have been working round the clock to provide relief to the victims. A government which was facing near bankruptcy in its budget last November is now boasting an overflowing treasury, but has signed memoranda of understanding with NGOs for reconstruction projects.

A statement signed by 170 Sri Lankan NGOs and about 30 international NGOs took the government to task on its proposed rebuilding plans. Entitled the "Civil Society Statement," the groups, while supporting the guiding principles of the government of "responding to local needs and priorities, without discrimination, in a transparent and accountable manner, through consultation and the empowerment of communities and their organizations," noted that in practice the complete opposite is taking place.

Victims from both the south and east of the nation have staged protests against the government's apparent indifference to their needs, while it provides loopholes for the business sector to reap benefits. Undaunted by the criticism, the govern-

ment's energy minister recently announced its determination to go ahead with the coal power project and also the "restructuring" of the Electricity Board.

Indeed, the entire country is being saddled with economic burdens. In the last couple of months the price of kerosene, which is used mostly by low-income families for cooking and for lighting their homes, petrol and bus fares have all risen. World oil price inflation has been blamed.

In spite of the suffering of so many, Sri Lanka's major political parties seem preoccupied with other issues. The main opposition, the UNP, has launched a massive people's movement to pressure the government to call elections. Presidential elections are due this year, though Kumaratunge has claimed she was secretly sworn in to rule until 2006.

But it's the sharing of tsunami aid between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), popularly known as the Tamil Tigers, that has sparked the biggest controversy. The LTTE has military control of two north-eastern districts that were hit by the tsunami. In these areas, the writ of the government does not run and funding agencies deemed it necessary to hand over control of this portion of the tsunami aid to the LTTE to administer.

UPSURGE OF NATIONAL CONFLICT

The majority of Sri Lankans are Sinhalese. Citing ethnic discrimination against the Tamil minority, the LTTE has been fighting for a separate state in the north of the country for nearly two decades. In February 2002, the UNP government of the time signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the LTTE as a hopeful precursor to a negotiated settlement.

But peace efforts stalled when the LTTE presented a set of proposals to which the majority of Sinhalese were opposed, and the UNP lost power to a coalition of Kumaratunge's Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the ostensibly Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which entered government for the first time. The JVP led two armed struggles in the 1970s and later in the 1980s to wrest power from the governments of the time.

Despite enjoying more support amongst the economically deprived, the

JVP has not wielded its strength to contain inflation except to protest the government's plans to privatize public utilities. Instead, the JVP has adopted a more nationalistic agenda and has been at the forefront of blocking attempts by the government to share the tsunami aid with the LTTE. Arguing that the deal would provide legitimacy to the Tamil Tigers, the JVP and the Jathika Hela Urumaya (a political party made up mostly of Buddhist monks) has been staging chauvinist mass protests and death fasts.

Ignoring their threats, Kumaratunge went ahead with signing the aid sharing agreement with the LTTE in June, in the hope that it would provide an opportunity to renew peace talks with the rebels. However, a recent spate of killings, in which the dead included two LTTE leaders, has led the Tigers to warn of a return to war. Insisting that the Tamil Tigers should lay down arms before their demands are considered, the JVP quit the government a week before the agreement was signed. It then went to court, and has now succeeded in stalling the implementation of the aid sharing agreement.

On the Muslim front too, there is much dissent. Muslims were the worst hit community in the tsunami, which destroyed the heavily Muslim eastern coast. It is estimated that Muslims accounted for nearly half of the tsunami death toll. In terms of losses to land and buildings too, they were the most affected.

However, reports indicate that this group has been the most neglected in terms of aid and land distribution since the tsunami. Indeed, the grievances of the Muslim community have long gone unheeded, and even in the aid-sharing agreement their concerns have not been adequately addressed, leaving them disgruntled. The southeastern coast has also been home to internecine battles and assassinations between the LTTE and a breakaway group this past year.

With only a handful of not-for-profit organizations and minor socialist political parties speaking up for the tsunami survivors, the recovery program has the markings of promoting a paradise isle for the rich and powerful. Arugam Bay and the rest of the coast may well become out of bounds for the "five dollar" tourist.★

REFERENDUM IN FRANCE

The French 'No' and its consequences

BY MURRAY SMITH

The resounding “No” vote in France’s May 29th referendum on the European constitutional treaty is still reverberating through Europe. After six months of campaigning, voters rejected the treaty by a majority of nearly 55 per cent. It would be an understatement to say that this was not the result the French ruling class and its partners in the European Union had been hoping for. Indeed, had French president Jacques Chirac had any idea that voters were going to reject the treaty, he would never have called a referendum. He would, like the majority of his colleagues in the EU, have simply had the treaty approved by Parliament. But Chirac was sure that he would win the referendum and that the treaty – and himself – would then have increased legitimacy in the eyes of the French people. The result was the exact opposite. The proposed Constitution is largely discredited in France and increasingly so in Europe, especially following the Dutch “No” vote three days after the French. And Chirac himself is plumbing new depths of unpopularity.

The campaign for a “Yes” vote was supported by the government, the two mainstream right-wing parties (the UMP and the UDF), by the leaderships of the Socialist Party (SP) and the Greens, by the employers’ association MEDEF and practically all France’s top bosses, and by virtually the entire media. So it would be reasonable to ask what went wrong and who put a spike in the wheel of the ruling class’s plans. The forces on the Left who opposed the treaty launched a determined campaign, and in the end it was

above all the votes of ordinary working people who made the “No” win.

Last autumn, the “Appeal of the 200” was launched. This was a clear call to reject the treaty not on the basis of French nationalism, xenophobic attitudes, or opposition to Turkey joining the EU, but on the basis of a call for another Europe, for a “social and internationalist No”. On the basis of this appeal there were – by the time the referendum was held – around 1000 local collectives campaigning for a “No from the left”. The main political forces involved were the Communist Party and the LCR (the Revolutionary Communist League, which is the French section of the Fourth International), but the collectives also included many trade unionists, global justice campaigners and community activists. Significantly they also included militants from the Socialist Party and the Greens. The Socialist Party organized an internal referendum on the Constitution

last November. The result was 60 per cent for “Yes” and 40 per cent for “No”. Some of the minority accepted the vote. Others joined the united front campaign launched by the Appeal of the 200. Former First Secretary Henri Emmanuelli, who did not want to be associated with the radical Left, ran his own campaign. Former Prime minister and SP number 2, Laurent Fabius, also ran his own campaign, using his access to the media very effectively. The Greens also organized an internal vote with a narrower result in favour, 53 per cent. As with the SP, those in the minority campaigned actively for a “No” vote. Nevertheless, as 2004 ended a “Yes” vote still looked likely.

But the first months of 2005 reinforced the “No” campaign. From January on there was a sharp upswing in social mobilisations – over wages, defence of public services and defence of the 35-hour week. There was also a large student



Campaigning for a “No” vote was widespread in France in the lead-up to the referendum.

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movement throughout the spring. So the referendum campaign was taking place against a background of social unrest, which made it easier to make the link between the government's policies in France and the proposed Constitution. Things also moved on the trade union front. In February the main union confederation, the CGT, came out in favour of rejecting the treaty, going against its own general secretary. Militants from the CGT, the main teachers' union the FSU and the radical union federation Solidaires were actively involved in the campaign. The global justice movement ATTAC and the Peasant Confederation also campaigned for a "No". The mass political campaign for a "No from the Left" – with more than 200,000 people attending its public meetings – was the decisive factor in the referendum results.

The constitution was comprehensively unmasked and revealed for what it was. First, it aimed to set free-market policies in stone and dismantle what remains of the European social model. Indeed, the whole of part III – the longest part and the part which was given constitutional status – was one long ode in praise of the free market economy.

Second, the anti-democratic implications of the constitution were clear: the constitution contained provisions which would take power away from national parliaments and place it not in the largely powerless European Parliament, but in the hands of the non-elected Council of Ministers and the Commission.

Finally, by approving the constitution, states committed themselves to increasing their military spending and working more closely with NATO. Such a provision would negate the possibility of ever having a Europe more peaceful and less militaristic than its US counterpart.

Voting on May 29th fell along class and age lines – 80 per cent of manual workers voted "No" as did a majority of all those earning less than 3,000 euros a month. Nearly 60 per cent of 18-34 year-olds and 65 per cent of 35-49 year-olds also voted "No" – the "Yes" was only in a majority among those over 65.

In France, the result of the referendum has provoked a crisis of political legitimacy. In February, the two houses of Parliament approved the treaty by a

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majority of 92 per cent. That shows the extent of the gulf between French public opinion and its elected representatives. Chirac is now in a very vulnerable position. Chirac's newly-appointed Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, presides over a weak government, but one which is stubbornly pursuing the neo-liberal agenda. The one strong figure is Nicolas Sarkozy, president of the UMP and Minister of the Interior, who has aggressively pursued this agenda. Sarkozy actively cultivates a right-wing populist discourse, appealing to voters of the far right National Front, which is currently in disarray. He has his eye on the presidency in 2007.

But it is not only the Right that is in crisis. The Socialist Party majority was disavowed by its own electors, 59 per cent of whom voted "No". The reaction of the leadership around François Hollande was to close ranks and purge the party's leading bodies of partisans of the "No". The SP is now headed for a congress of crisis in November, whose outcome cannot be predicted. A victory for Fabius would make it easier to patch together an alliance with the CP and the Greens. But Fabius, in spite of his "No", has not broken from social-liberalism (the social democratic version of neo-liberalism). A new Union of the Left would be contradictory to the dynamic of the "No from the left" campaign. The challenge for anti-capitalist forces is to use this dynamic to advance a broad anti-capitalist alliance that breaks from social-liberalism. That is what the LCR is defending in the collectives, which continue to exist, and in the debates with the CP and the other political components of the "No from the left".

On a European level, the French and Dutch "No's" have probably killed the constitutional treaty. The results were sufficiently decisive to rule out simply re-

running the two referendums. But the European ruling classes have not abandoned the project that the Constitution was meant to legitimise. They will push forward the neoliberal project and much of what was in the constitutional treaty by means of circulars, decrees and inter-governmental agreements. In the eventuality of a new "less than constitutional" treaty being negotiated, the only countries in the Union that are required by their national constitutions to organise referenda are Denmark and Ireland. They might refuse, but that would have less impact and be easier to handle than the votes in France and Holland.

The popular refusal of the anticipated Constitution in France and Holland has shaken the European ruling classes and will accentuate the contradictions between them. But if Left forces do not advance beyond what they have accomplished thus far, the ruling classes will retake the initiative. That is why the left forces that led the "No" campaigns in the two countries have the responsibility to take their own initiatives and to launch the debate on "another Europe" across the continent.

Up to now the construction of the EU has been the work of political elites and bureaucracies operating behind the backs of the people, with their decisions periodically validated by national parliaments or less often, by referenda. The breach opened in France and Holland can be the occasion to take the debate on the future of Europe to the working classes and peoples of the continent. The challenge for the anti-capitalist Left and social movements is not to fall back on national isolation but to show that as the global justice movement puts it, "another Europe is possible" – one that will be built by and for workers and people against neo-liberal capitalism.★

Is there sex after marriage?

BY ALAN SEARS

They've taken the sex out of sexual orientation! The movement for sexual liberation has gone all domestic. We hear a lot about same-sex marriage these days, but very little about the vision of unbounded sexuality that was associated with gay liberation.

The gay liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s developed a sexual libertarian politics to combat the policing of sexual activity between consenting persons. The goal was that people should have the freedom and the resources to freely explore sexuality. This sexual libertarian politics had real strengths and it was part of the reason that the lesbian and gay movement could mobilize so effectively to challenge the state officials and health care practitioners who tried to shut down gay sex altogether in the early days of the AIDS epidemic.

But this sexual libertarianism had big blind spots too, and these were often identified by lesbian feminists. The realm of sexuality is not free of the power inequalities that shape this society. Sexual consent and erotic imagery raise complex issues precisely because of the impact of very real relations of inequality along lines of class, gender, race, sexuality and age.

Queer socialist feminists began to pull together the best of sexual libertarianism with an analysis of the ways power relations crosscut sexual practices, for example in the journal *Rites* in the 1980s. This was an important contribution to AIDS activism and to the short burst of militant queer activism in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Those sexual liberation politics have been eclipsed, due to the decline of the Left and of queer militancy. Now it's all about love and marriage and settling down. It is a tremendous victory that lesbians and gays have won the right to



Sexual liberation for everyone was the goal of the early lesbian and gay rights movement.

marriage, which is an important recognition of legal equality. But sex doesn't have to lead to marriage!

SEXUALITY DESEXED

Marriage is only one of the ways they've taken the sex out of sexuality. It seems that the sex has been bled out of sexual orientation as the cultural visibility of lesbians and gay men has increased. It is generally the chaste lesbian or gay man who appears in television programmes and movies. These folks sublimate their sexuality into witty, bitchy repartee and great taste in bathroom fixtures. Their lives are as clean as their sparkling floors and no one watching the show needs to worry that they might actually be getting it on when the camera turns off.

And it is not only queer sexuality that is desexed, though that is a particularly blatant case. Sex is used to sell everything in this society, except for condoms and birth control information. Condoms are sold boringly as safety devices (except in campaigns developed by gay men for gay men). Sex education is presented as dull mechanics, drained of any hint of hotness.

In short, we are in a society where

everything is sexualized – except sex. In general, sexual activity tends to be treated as shameful, unspeakable and invisible. We all know that lots of high school students are having sex, but it is pushed underground into the nether lands of drunken groping in the back seats of cars or quickies before the parental figures get home from work. People are often not good at communicating their sexual desires to partners, except in the form of coded messages like the old cliché about headaches.

Sex is everywhere and nowhere in this society. Growing up in these conditions, we tend to assume that it is simply a characteristic of human sexuality to be omnipresent, alluring and elusive. But there is nothing natural about this experience of sexuality, which has to do with the particular features of capitalist society.

HOT COMMODITIES

The sexualization of everything in this society has to do with the role of market forces in our daily lives. At the most obvious level, sex is used to sell everything from beer to cars. This seems to be a simple advertising ploy to channel our sexual desires towards commodities we can buy on the market place. But it is not only an advertising gimmick. The redirection of our desires away from

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actual human bodies and towards commodities exchanged on the marketplace is actually a core feature of capitalist society.

Marx argued that in capitalist societies we tend to fetishize commodities, or in other words we attribute mystical powers to things that are exchanged on the market. Our daily experience tends to convince us that commodities have the real power in society. Suddenly the price of oil skyrockets, stocks plummet, currencies rise or fall. It all seems quite beyond our control and yet it has a huge impact on our lives. We can get tossed out of work, or told that we have to accept concessions on wages or benefits to keep our jobs. Our employers blame market conditions, as if the commodities made them do it.

In this situation, it makes sense that we want to be like commodities. It seems like humans do the crap work to service the commodities who have the real power to make things happen. We seek to shed the dreary daily grind of existence in a human body, which mainly means labour under the control of others, and to enter into the glorious realm of exchange, where the big decisions are made.

COMMODITY FETISHISM

There is nothing natural about commodity fetishism. Indeed, people do have the power to change things and commodities are merely the products of our labour. The real power in our society is not held by a bunch of commodities haggling over the conditions of our existence, but by a dominant class of employers backed by the state. But our daily experience seems to point to wonderful powers in the circulation of commodities.

Therefore, a shirt at the mall, still in the realm of exchange, seems to have the transformative powers to make me look like a star. But when I get it home and try it on, it is only a use value, a shirt to wear. I look in the mirror and see the same guy now wearing an ill-fitting and perhaps age-inappropriate shirt. What was I thinking? Somehow when the thing was still in the realm of circulation, it was more than a shirt, it was a totem with the power to make a difference.

Commodities, then, seem hot and desirable while human bodies appear to be mere things, instruments of tedious

The redirection of our desires away from actual human bodies and towards commodities exchanged on the marketplace is actually a core feature of capitalist society.

labour. The commodified and unattainable image seems far more desirable than any real human body. The merely human is measured against the unattainable image in the realm of exchange. It is not only that the image captures a model who has not eaten a carbohydrate in days and who is deliberately sculpted, perfectly posed, ideally lit and then air-brushed and processed to eliminate any contami-

nating evidence of humanity. It is also that the image is bathed in the mystical light of the powers we attribute to commodities.

Sexual freedom, then, is not only about the realm of sexuality but about the way we live our lives. We have made real gains over the last century in control over our bodies and our lives, because people fought for access to contraception and abortion, for lesbian and gay liberation, against sexual coercion and for sex education and the right to distribute sexual information. But we still have a long fight to win for liberation.

Sexual freedom under capitalism slides into the unbounded desire for commodities. The virtual sexuality of the internet, whether in the form of porn or chat sites, would seem to be an ideal expression of sexual freedom under capitalism. The flight from actual human bodies into the realm of circulation seems to be accomplished when our desire is virtualized. Sexuality is one of the realms in which the limits of freedom under capitalism become apparent.★

read

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Begging the question

GEORGE ORWELL:
ENIGMATIC SOCIALIST.

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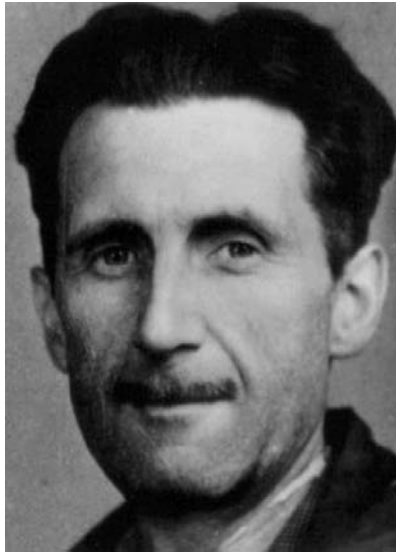
REVIEWED
BY KEITH O'REGAN

With the possible exceptions of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin and Tommy Douglas, no figure on the Left, living or dead, is as universally well known in this country as George Orwell.

And, unlike these others, almost every high school graduate can claim to have been required to read one if not two of his texts. Of course, Orwell's Left wing credentials are not the reason for his popularity among the educational establishment. The Orwell popularly disseminated is a fervent anti-communist who, as the story goes, laid bare the "insanities" and barbarities of communism.

Yet despite this, we should beware of falling into a position of "their Orwell and ours." For, while there may be much in Orwell that we wish to retain, much of his work is simply beyond redemption.

And it is on this problem that the authors in this collection of essays on Orwell hang their hats. With one exception, the authors are drawn from the ranks of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and every last revolutionary socialist man of them (there is no female



writer of any of the ten essays) is in some manner grappling with Orwell's standing on the Left.

RECLAIMING ORWELL

The majority of the essays in this collection, written between 1967 and 2000, have sought to reclaim the author of *Animal Farm* and *1984* from two principal groups: Western conservatives and the formerly influential bloc of European Communists. The latter, whose contemporary attacks on Orwell simply rehash their forebears' diatribes against Orwell's indictment of Stalinism in action in *Homage to Catalonia*, are quickly brushed away and rightly so.

The former, however, require a different approach because the reactionary reading of Orwell – that of a one-time fellow traveller who saw the light and warned the world of the dangers of socialism – is still very much in play and heavily fortified by aforementioned high school curricula the world over. To this we can add the concerted efforts of ideologists of capitalist imperialism, many of whom were one-time Trotskyists themselves (Max Eastman, James Burnham

and now Christopher Hitchens).

The conservatives are dealt with in two ways. The first, perhaps the more common approach here, is to discredit the 'epiphany' reading of Orwell by reviewing the sizeable body of critical-leftist journalism that Orwell produced before, while and after he wrote *Animal Farm* and *1984*.

This strategy bears considerable fruit and the authors who take up this line (predominantly John Newsinger and Peter Sedgwick) are on fairly safe ground. Newsinger argues that it is erroneous to say that Orwell had recanted his Left-wing politics when he himself repeatedly claimed that his attacks on the Soviet Union were not an abandonment of socialism, but rather an attempt to rescue socialism from the barbarities of the Soviet 'communism'. Couple this with the fact that Orwell continued to be involved in radical journals until his last productive days and the claims of conservatives come off hollow.

INADEQUATE POLITICS

The second and less persuasive argument holds that the reason that the Right has been so successful in their appropriations of Orwell is that Orwell's inadequate politics (read not Marxist) left the door ajar, or perhaps even invited such a reading. *Animal Farm* (and most likely *1984* as well) were accidents waiting to happen, or, as John Molyneux crudely puts it, "a 'right wing' book by a 'left wing' writer."

The ultimate failure for Molyneux is that Orwell has little faith in the working class as the agent of change. This claim will seem wildly inconsistent for readers of *Homage to Catalonia*, and there are times when Molyneux's lack of sophisticated argumentation makes one wince.

This is not to say that Molyneux is bereft of ideas to prove his point.

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Examining the text closely, for instance, Molyneux notes that in *Animal Farm* Orwell writes: “The reading and writing classes however were a great success. By autumn almost every animal was literate to some degree.” However, on the very next page of *Animal Farm*, as Molyneux summarises Orwell, “apart from the pigs, only the dogs, Muriel the goat and Benjamin the donkey learn to read. The vast bulk of animals get no further than the letter A.” Thus, Orwell contradicts himself within the space of one page.

This gem of an insight should form part of the lynchpin of Molyneux’s argument, but we find it buried in a footnote. For Molyneux, it is seemingly better to berate Orwell for including no Lenin figure in the text than to pursue a method of inquiry along the lines of Trotsky, who would argue, as Molyneux himself points out, that “a work of art must first be judged by the laws of art, and a novel cannot be treated as if it were merely the dramatization of a political treatise.”

ORWELL’S LITERARY TEXT

And this, despite many careful and persuasive insights, is the main criticism of *George Orwell: Enigmatic Socialist*; Orwell’s position as a writer of fiction is never given its due. If there is a critique of Orwell’s literary text, the authors respond not by trying to unpack the text, but substantiate their points through either biographical repudiation or a reliance on his journalistic/essayistic work.

Why then is Orwell’s literary work worthy of redemption? Because he openly declared that he was a socialist and he called for and wrote about revolutions. This logic leads the authors to advance positions that are ultimately untenable.

Most obvious here is the declaration that Orwell has the unpleasant distinction of being the only socialist gleefully championed by conservatives of all sorts. This betrays a real weakness as one wonders why a poet of such sheer radical intensity as William Blake is excluded, when his work is routinely appropriated in the cause of oppressive, nationalistic structures.

What’s more, the style of Orwell’s writing, his “clear as a window pane” prose, which has contributed signifi-

cantly to his wide public audience, goes unaddressed.

ORWELL’S POLITICS

An appreciation of Orwell’s literary texts is not the only thing left wanting here. A sufficient analysis of Orwell’s at times outrageous sexism and homophobia is also largely absent. Orwell equation of feminists with “vegetarians with wilting beards”, “sandal wearers” and

It is with this in mind that one should remember that, in 1984, the working classes are hardly in need of control in comparison to middle class intellectuals. This latter group must be ruthlessly controlled and brought to believe – by all means – in the current order.

And if there is one group that Orwell is convinced could provide an obstacle to democratic socialism it is the intellectuals. Not just intellectuals per se, but

Orwell ... repeatedly claimed that his attacks on the Soviet Union were ... an attempt to rescue socialism from the barbarities of the “Soviet communism.”

“sex-maniacs” is hair-raisingly infuriating.

His further inclusion of the brazenly homophobic “nancy” or “pansy poets” in his litany of dislikes just adds to the noxious, oppressive politics that Orwell was capable of advancing. Yet if the authors here do not sufficiently deal with this side of Orwell, they are (perhaps predictably) much better on Orwell’s anti-Stalinism and his support for working class struggles towards socialism.

As many of the authors here point out, Orwell is trapped in the idea of the simpleton who nonetheless does right in the end, despite those smart ones who might lead him astray. This is an age-old story, a fable (as *Animal Farm* is) if you will. Yet it is here where Orwell fails.

Orwell’s lack of theoretical consistency leads very often to insulting reductionism, as is evident in the following. He writes: “The struggle of the working class is like the growth of a plant. The plant is blind and stupid, but it knows enough to keep pushing upwards towards the light, and it will do this in face of endless discouragements.”

specifically Stalinist intellectuals, posed the greatest danger, as they had a considerable record of snuffing out revolutionary potential.

Here one may have sympathy with Orwell, as readers of *Homage to Catalonia* can attest. What many readers will have remembered from reading *Homage to Catalonia* is the image of Barcelona, as Orwell phrases it, a city where “the working class was in the saddle.” Yet seeing a functioning socialist city, however embryonic, did not win Orwell over to revolutionary socialism. What wins Orwell over is his return to Barcelona, when the Stalinists are working to smother the revolutionary impulse.

Orwell, having seen socialism as a viable proposition crushed by those who are supposedly its proponents, will take from this tragedy a severe hatred of Soviet-run society and its necessary lies. This is Orwell’s greatest strength and although at this low ebb of revolutionary struggle we may find Orwell’s critique somewhat distant, Orwell’s failures and his successes, and his currency, can prove vital to a truly revolutionary politics.★

Holy crazy queer nerd-rap ... again

I'd promised myself to not write about off kilter hip-hop this column, but... Holy crazy queer nerd-rap, Batman! Courtesy of the fabulous Audra Williams (www.leftylucy.ca), I was recently exposed to "How to Express Your Dissenting Political Viewpoint Through Origami" by Halifax hip-hopper Jesse Dangerously from Backburner Recordings (www.backburner.ca). It took a while to get into the CD's 22 tracks – they drift from relatively conventional hip-hop to the more abstract realms of sampled instrumental to a cover of 60s comic Tom Lehrer's "The Elements"! As is noted on the back of the CD, "Any sample rules I bent or broke, it was because I was teenager at the time." Perhaps this lack of interest in commercial propriety is what gives this album its sense of general craziness. Dangerously plays around with his persona in interesting ways – a sample refers to "Don't you know your last name is an adverb?", to riffs on Jesse Ventura and the most fabulous "A Single Gay Man On His Thirtieth Birthday." There are several purely instrumental tracks on the CD and they're beautiful. This CD should appeal to fans of Gang Starr, Macy Gray, Slick Rick and k-os.

For years, Toronto has been haunted by the specter of Torpor Vigil Industries (www.torporvigil.com), a multi-dimensional number of art projects or purveyor of Fine Quality Reality by local Surrealist Steve Venright. His most recent projects have been the release of a CD of Dion McGregor's stories told while McGregor was sound asleep. Amongst other recordings are Sam Andreyev's compositions and an audio version of poet Christopher Dewdney's *A Natural History of*



Halifax hip hop artist, Jesse Dangerously.

Southwestern Ontario. Venright is also the author of the fine books, *Spiral Agitator* and *Straunge Wunder*, both very brilliant sketches and documents of that weird stuff that goes on between words and the constant shifting of brain matter. Be sure to take a look at "A Day in the Life of the TVI Mobile Reality Inspection Lab" (www.torporvigil.com/vortunportal1.html) on the TVI website.

Finally, please support the US-based Christian Alliance For Progress (www.christianalliance.org/site/c.bnKIIQNtEoG/b.592941/k.CB7C/Home.htm), a group of Left Christians sick of homophobic sexist war-mongers claiming morality as their own. Their stated values are: pursuing economic justice, responsible environmental stewardship for today,

equality for gays and lesbians, effective prevention vs. criminalizing abortion, seeking peace, not war, and health care for all Americans. If an effective Left is to emerge in the US, it needs to take into account progressive Christians and not give the hawks, neo-conservatives and sexist homophobes a monopoly on so-called morality.

While on the subject of neo-cons in the US, readers might find David Horowitz's Discover The Network (discoverthenetwork.org) a hoot. As a long ago Trotskyist turned neo-con, Horowitz and his associates have a fine eye for sectarian detail and understand the importance of economics, politics and ideas. It's not a completely bad map of the US and international Left, though the insinuations of a cabal between Mumia Abu Jamal, Hillary Clinton and George Soros are a bit hard to stomach.★

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

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NDP caucus celebrates its neoliberal budget. See article by Harold Lavender on page 8.

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