

EDITORIAL

After the federal election

The federal election is over and there is little to cheer about. Our situation threatens to go from bad to worse, and many worry that the worst is yet to come under the Tories. Things will not change for the better unless large numbers of people recognize the danger signals and mobilize to defend their rights and interests.

The Liberals faithfully served corporate interests, while cynically promising reforms that were never delivered. Martin helped paved the way for the Tories through huge cuts in federal program spending and transfers to the provinces, increased military spending and Canadian intervention in Afghanistan and Haiti.

A clear majority of people voted against the Tories, so the Tory minority government does not signify strong support for a right turn or social conservatism. And as a minority government, the Tories face constraints on what they can achieve.

However, the last thing social movements and the Left should do is sigh, say it could have been worse and go back to sleep. We should not make the mistake of underestimating our enemies. The Tory campaign showed that Harper was not a bungler but a man on a mission.

The Tories may decide to bide their time and strike a relatively moderate pose, except on issues such as a crime where the right-wing tide is running high. However, no one should be fooled. If they succeed in obtaining a majority in the next election they will ruthlessly implement an anti-worker, anti-woman, anti-queer, anti-environmental, racist and militarist agenda.

People who have experienced the right-wing Campbell and Harris governments in BC and Ontario know what this means. Big tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy have inevitable consequences, gutting badly-needed public services and increasing privatization in areas such as health care.

In the absence of rising, outwardly-engaged movements and radical ideas, this election seemed isolated and marginal. But this need not be a permanent state of affairs. The current situation is dangerous but also holds opportunities.

HOW CAN THE TORY AGENDA BE DEFEATED?

Some will look to elect the Liberals as the lesser evil. This election CAW President Buzz Hargrove go so far as to ally himself with Paul Martin, abandoning any notion of working-class political action independent of the parties of the ruling class. This is the road to nowhere. The last thing we need is a Liberal-labour alliance akin to the Democratic

party in the US.

What about the NDP? From a Left and activist perspective there was nothing to cheer about in the Jack Layton campaign and its appeals to “working families.” The direction of the federal NDP has become crystal clear — it is moving to the right. The NDP differentiated itself a little by opposing corporate tax cuts, privatization of health and the Bush agenda. But it called for a balanced budget, promised no new corporate taxes, offered its version of “get tough on crime” and refused to challenge the Canadian military’s role in warlike occupations.

The NDP may sometimes try and act as a parliamentary brake on the Tories. But Layton’s talk about cooperating to “make parliament work” makes it plain that the NDP wants to avoid bringing down the Tory minority government, for fear that voters who buy into the reactionary “we don’t want another election” sentiment would punish the NDP at the polls.

The Conservatives will only be defeated if they are challenged in society at large by visible and vocal opposition organizing itself and taking to the streets. Many do not want to take the Harper agenda lying down. *New Socialist* calls for people to not to give the new government a chance.

Renewed mobilization by unions, anti-poverty groups, students and a strengthened anti-war & anti-intervention movement are our weapons to defeat Harper. There is a crying need for a new women’s movement to defend the existing hard-won right to choose and to win universal quality public child care services.

It has been a decade since the last major pan-Canadian mobilization against the federal government around domestic issues: the 1996 women’s march against poverty organized by unions and the women’s movement. This of activism and the timid conservatism of the Canadian Labour Congress leadership means that for now mobilization against the Tories will probably be on a small scale unless they miscalculate and try to push through a particularly unpopular measure.

Nevertheless, it is essential to be involved in the rebirth of opposition and struggle. This is the best way to block Tory plans and make the next government less likely to launch a new round of attacks.

Only a new wave of protest and resistance can create hope and new possibilities for positive political initiatives on the Left, just as the global justice movement did in 2000-2001. *New Socialist* looks forward to being a forum for discussing how we can best fight back and win. ★

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NEW SOCIALIST offers radical analysis of politics, social movements and culture in the Canadian state and internationally. Our magazine is a forum for people who want to strengthen today's activism and for those who wish to replace global capitalism with a genuinely democratic socialism. We believe that the liberation of the working class and oppressed peoples can be won only through their own struggles. For more information about the publisher of this magazine, the New Socialist Group, please see the inside back cover.

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Disability rights and immigration

BY RAVI MALHOTRA

In recent years, activist organizations such as “No One is Illegal” and “Justicia for Migrant Workers” have played an important role in raising publicity and solidarity about the serious and systemic problems that many undocumented immigrants and refugees experience in the Canadian immigration system as well as their exploitation in informal labour markets. In light of the nationalist politics that still dominate much of the English Canadian Left and its marked tendency to regard the Canadian state as a bastion of progress and enlightenment untouched by the blemishes of racism or vicious class exploitation, this solidarity work has been extraordinarily important in exposing an uglier and strategically crucial side of how capitalism really operates. However, one issue that has been almost entirely ignored by left organizations and activists, time and again, is the virtual exclusion of people with disabilities as potential immigrants under the Canadian *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. Also ignored are the efforts by disability rights activists to challenge these exclusions.

The failure of activists to take up the rights of disabled immigrants reveals two major social problems with profound implications for the Left: (i) the continued marginalization of issues affecting people with disabilities and their theoretical analysis on the activist Left; and (ii) a missed opportunity for better appreciating how, despite liberal fantasies about multiculturalism, the immigration system fundamentally is about cream

One issue that has been almost entirely ignored by Left organizations and activists is the virtual exclusion of people with disabilities as potential immigrants.

skimming the most desirable immigrants that will benefit Canadian capital and corporations through their labour, while rejecting those who are deemed to have no marketable value.

THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABLEMENT

Before one can fully appreciate the issue, it is important to begin with a solid appreciation of disability discrimination, an awareness often lacking across all segments of the Left. Disability is best understood as a political issue that implicates the structural barriers that handicap people with disabilities, whether they be mobility, sensory, intellectual or mental health disabilities. While there are different theories of disablement that vary slightly in their details, the overwhelming focus is on the barriers rather than the physiological impairment in the disabled person's body. These include a lack of wheelchair access in every conceivable type of public space ranging from universities to bookstores to restaurants and nightclubs. One glimpse at a campus such as the University of Toronto or Queen's will make this point very evident to even the most casual observer.

Other barriers include a massive failure to provide materials required for work, school or recreation in formats accessible to blind and visually impaired people in a timely manner. A most significant social

barrier is the widespread and pernicious attitudes that regard people with disabilities as incompetent, pathetic, asexual and fundamentally “inauthentic workers” to use a phrase coined by legal scholar Vicki Schultz. People with disabilities remain far more likely to be impoverished, unemployed and have lower levels of education than the average Canadian, yet the issue barely registers on the radar of most of the political Left.

Challenging all of these barriers is the project of the young but growing and increasingly vibrant disability rights movement. These activists embrace a philosophy known as the social model of disablement, which can be regarded as complimentary to feminist theories of patriarchy or queer theories of heterosexism. The social model of disablement contrasts with the medical model that focuses on the disabled person's physiological impairment as the basis for public policy.

Despite the explosion of literature on new social movements in the last three decades, a genuine appreciation of disability oppression is surprisingly scarce on the Canadian Left where disabilities are most commonly regarded as personal medical problems rather than political issues. At the same time, awareness in society has increased because of both grassroots mobilization and consciousness raising by disability rights advocates

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and because of publicity and real, if very limited and contradictory, legal gains that people with disabilities have won by the inclusion of disability discrimination in the various provincial and federal human rights codes and in the equality provision of the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. In the case of the *Charter*, a document that has achieved almost legendary status on the nationalist Canadian Left, disability discrimination was only prohibited after mobilization by disability rights activists to have the original exclusionary version of the document amended.

JUSTIFYING THE EXCLUSION OF MIGRANTS WITH DISABILITIES

With this background in mind, it becomes much easier to appreciate the poor treatment of people with disabilities under provisions in both the original *Immigration Act* and the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) that was enacted to replace it in 2002. Canada's system of immigration has always been about bringing the most economically desirable workers into the country regardless of the implications for the immigrants' quality of life.

While it is true that family reunification has often been touted as a major policy goal, at least in the sense of the heterosexual nuclear family, this has only been selectively applied. For instance, Chinese men who were granted immigration status to build the Canadian railway system were notoriously prevented from bringing their families with them and such discriminatory policies regarding the landing of Asian immigrants continued into the 1950s. While there is no doubt that racism played a significant

role in this policy, it also signifies the fact that families of certain classes of immigrant workers were regarded as economically inefficient and therefore irrelevant for the needs of Canadian capital accumulation.

Similarly, people with disabilities have historically been excluded as inadmissible because the explicit point of immigration

Disability is best understood as a political issue that implicates the structural barriers that handicap people with disabilities, whether they be mobility, sensory, intellectual or mental health disabilities.

policy has always been to have the most efficient and productive pool of immigrants possible. With the rise of the eugenics movement, very prominent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries until it was discredited in the aftermath of the Nazi Holocaust, excluding people with disabilities in Canada

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and other Western countries became almost a scientific norm that was generally accepted as sound public policy.

Eugenics was a dysfunctional attempt to improve society through a misuse of science by weeding out, through segregation or sterilization, those elements that were regarded as inferior. While people with mental and physical disabilities were always a prime target of proponents of eugenics, this philosophy was also deeply imbued with racist, sexist and classist ideas from start to finish. Indeed, eugenics thinking was so widely accepted that such unlikely and otherwise progressive figures as the suffragette Nellie McClung and J.S. Woodsworth, the first leader of the social democratic Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), endorsed the concept. Relying on the principles of eugenics, nearly three thousand Albertans and a smaller number of British Columbians who were deemed to have "mental defects", in particular women, teenagers and indigenous peoples, were sterilized. The Alberta Eugenics Board was not abolished until 1972 and compensation payments to sterilized adults were not made in most cases until the late 1990s.

Canadian legislation prohibiting the entry of immigrants with disabilities may in fact be traced back to the 1850s, prior to Confederation. There was always a particular fear of admitting people with mental health or intellectual disabilities. What is remarkable, and perhaps indicates how immigration policy was affected by the eugenics paradigm, is the fact that prior to amendments to the *Immigration Act* in 1927 people with disabilities who were able to demonstrate that their families would permanently provide financial support *were* admitted. Only after 1927 were people with disabilities entirely prohibited. Canada was not alone in creating such policies, and particularly poignant are anecdotes of US immigration officials who would write



Welcome? Not for those with disabilities

letters in chalk on the backs of prospective immigrants who had disembarked by ship to indicate various disabilities that could potentially be grounds for deportation or exclusion. In fact, Canadian legislation in this era fined ship operators for transporting passengers with disabilities.

EXCESSIVE BURDENS

Although eugenics has been justifiably marginalized in the post-war period, the basis for excluding people with disabilities has simply shifted from overt biological inferiority to concerns that people with disabilities cannot make valuable contributions to the economy and/or constitute an excessive burden on health or social services. This type of language was codified in amendments to the *Immigration Act* in 1976.

Unfortunately, despite the growth of a disability rights movement in the last thirty years and especially since the mid-1980s, the immigration system has proven to be a staunch bastion of discrimination against people with disabilities and plays, at a time of neo-liberal cutbacks, on public perceptions of a health care system that faces ruin at the hands of costly foreigners with complex medical issues. This is ironic because hostility to immigrants with disabilities clearly long predates the establishment of Medicare. Until very recently, prohibitions on immigration applied not simply to working-age immigrants but even to dependent spouses and children as well because of fears that they would impose an excessive demand on health or social services.

The discredited “medical model” of disability is at the core of this system. Physicians have the power to make decisions about the admissibility of immi-



grants, even though physicians simply are not in any position to accurately assess how a specific physiological impairment will interact with the social environment to create a particular economic outcome.

DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS FIGHT BACK

There have been attempts to challenge this blatant discrimination in Canadian courts. In *Chesters v. Canada*, a plaintiff challenged the constitutionality of a provision of the old *Immigration Act* that deemed individuals to be inadmissible for immigration if there were reasonable grounds to believe the prospective immigrant would place an excessive demand on health or social services.

The case concerned a German citizen who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and used a wheelchair. She had married a Canadian citizen and applied for permanent residence as part of the

family class. Despite the fact that she was a very highly educated woman, immigration authorities had concluded that she was not eligible to immigrate merely because it was believed her disability would cause an excessive demand on health and social services. She was permitted to enter Canada with a “Minister’s Permit”, hardly an appropriate resolution as this permit only bestows a precarious status in Canada for a temporary period during which she was not entitled to work or receive social benefits.

In 2002, the Federal Court (Trial Division) dismissed her case. Basing its reasoning on the long history of backward legal precedents that state that no person has a “right” to entry to Canada, the Federal Court bizarrely ruled that her legal challenge was not about equality rights for people with disabilities but merely about challenging the provision

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Why should advocates of social justice accept the concept that immigrants with disabilities ought to be valued by their labour power as determined by the marketplace? This is a crass form of commodification that has to be challenged by both immigrants and non-immigrants.

constraining immigrants who would place excessive demands on Canadian health or social services. This circular mode of specious reasoning completely ignores the fact that medical inadmissibility criteria only screen potential immigrants on the basis of health conditions (and not other potentially costly lifestyle conditions) and the fact that people with disabilities can make important contributions to the economy.

One small ray of hope in all this is the fact that the much criticized *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* that has replaced the old *Immigration Act* no longer prohibits immigrants with disabilities who are: (a) being sponsored by a Canadian spouse; (b) being sponsored by a Canadian parent in the case of dependent children; or (c) individuals who have been granted refugee status in Canada. These three categories of immigrants are now permitted to become landed immigrants in Canada regardless of any impact on the health care system or social services. For all its many flaws that have attracted justified criticism from the Left, this particular feature of the new Act is a positive reform.

Also positive news is the very recent decision by the Supreme Court of Canada in *Hilewitz v. Canada*. In that case, the Supreme Court has instructed immigration authorities to look at the family circumstances of disabled children of immigrants, including financial resources and community supports. In other words, immigrants who would normally be excluded because of their disabled children, can now come to Canada if they can show they have financial and other resources to support their children without posing an “excessive

burden on social services.” This decision is helpful in that it undermines what would otherwise be the wholesale exclusion of people with disabilities. Its impact, however, will likely only be enjoyed by wealthier immigrants, such as those who have already been accepted in the “Investor” and “Self-Employed” categories, and can therefore provide reasonable evidence of resources and supports to persuade immigration authorities that the family is able to absorb any potential social costs of their children’s disabilities.

VALUING THE LIVES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

There nevertheless remains a major problem. Despite these positive changes, the vast majority of potential immigrants with disabilities, such as independent applicants or sponsored immigrants who are neither spouses nor children, are still subjected to demeaning testing to determine whether their disabilities cause an excessive demand on health or social services. Such an approach appears completely devoid of any true understanding of the social model of disablement and regards disability in an entirely negative light, detached from the social environment that handicaps and discriminates against people with disabilities. The reality is that many immigrants with disabilities have talents and gifts that can make a contribution to Canadian society.

There is also a deeper dilemma for advocates of social justice as well as disability rights activists. Why should advocates of social justice accept the concept that immigrants with disabilities, regardless of their classification in the hideously complex bureaucracy that is contemporary Canadian immigration

law, ought to be valued by their labour power as determined by the marketplace? This is a crass form of commodification that has to be challenged by both immigrants and non-immigrants.

In a powerful piece that appeared recently in the American socialist journal *Monthly Review*, American disability rights activist and painter Sunny Taylor has eloquently made the case for not valuing the lives of people with disabilities by their ability to work in the capitalist marketplace. Instead, any genuine movement for social justice would encompass a broader notion of human flourishing that did not tie human worth to the capacity to perform wage labour. Disability rights activism on immigration issues only underscores this point as well as showing the main focus of the immigration system is toward facilitating profitability.

Disability rights activism on immigration issues also opens up the possibility for a more multiracial disability rights activism that has until recently been very white. The last conference of the Society for Disability Studies, which is one of the main centres of disability scholarship and activism in the United States and beyond, experienced a critique and mobilization from and by disabled people of colour who have felt marginalized by a disability rights movement that has often ignored their concerns. Immigration activism on disability issues provides the basis for greater solidarity across disparate constituencies in the hope of building another world of social justice. ★

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Marta Russell, *Beyond Ramps: Disability at the End of the Social Contract* (Common Courage Press).

Barrie Boone, “The Left and Disability” in *Against the Current* #115 (March/April 2005).

Michael Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement* (Macmillan).

Sunny Taylor, “The Right Not to Work: Power and Disability” in *Monthly Review* (March 2004).

Lessons from the BC teachers strike

BY HAROLD LAVENDER

Four hundred thousand BC teachers staged an illegal two-week strike in October 2005, in defiance of the BC Liberal government. What lessons can be learned to advance workers' struggles in BC? In November, Left Turn organized a panel of four union activists, Lisa Descary of the BC Teachers' Federation, Will Offley of the BC Nurses' Union, Gretchen Dulmage of the Hospital Employees' Union, and Laurence Boxall of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union.

Will Offley described the outcome of the teachers strike as "a tie but what a tie." He noted the teachers had seized the right to strike, saying, "you are not given the right to strike. You take the right to strike. And in so doing the BCTF has profoundly transformed the political situation in BC."

The Liberals were unable to crush the BCTF. Instead, in December 2005 they announced a U-turn in public sector bargaining tactics.

Finance Minister Carole Taylor announced there was a \$6 billion pot for public sector wage increases. Ninety per cent of public sector contracts in BC expire March 31, 2006. Taylor offered substantial bonuses for signing early and for signing contracts that don't expire until 2010 (after the Olympics).

TEACHERS WON A PARTIAL VICTORY

Lisa Descary, a teacher in Richmond, is her school staff union rep and was elected as a BCTF delegate to the convention of the BC Federation of Labour. Why, she asked, was the BCTF able to pull off at least a partial victory when other unions have not?

Harold Lavender is a member of the New Socialist editorial board.



LISA DESCARY

BC Fed rally in support of teachers, October 2005.

"If you asked me at the beginning of September whether my staff would go out on an illegal strike with no strike pay and be totally solid, I would have said not on your life." The situation, she said, was repeated across the province.

Indeed, a lot of teachers made surprisingly leaps during the strike, she noted. A middle-aged female teacher, a first-generation Canadian married to a businessman, told Lisa after 48 hours, "What we really need is a general strike. That would solve the problem." Another teacher who grew up in Shaughnessy (a very wealthy area of Vancouver) confided, "We need to stay out three months. That would do it."

According to Lisa, the teachers went on strike for three things. This included (1) staffing levels and working conditions stripped away by the Liberals; (2) bargaining rights (teachers had been declared an essential service by the BC Liberals); and (3) a fair salary hike.

"We didn't really win any of those things. Initially, some of us didn't think this was a victory," Lisa admitted. But "What made the strike really positive was the unity of the teachers." For a lot of

teachers it was victory because they were in a "morally justified struggle" to defend public education.

Part of the reason for the BCTF's achievement, Lisa mentioned, has to do with the democratic nature of the BCTF. Since 1978, a Left caucus in the BCTF called Teacher's Viewpoint has sought to make the BCTF a grassroots federation that listens to the voice of individual teachers in local unions. "I believe we are pretty much that way today," Lisa said.

She pointed out that a pre-strike vote allowed teachers to vote on whether to return to work and not allow the executive to make that decision.

"We expect that type of democracy. A lot of us were shocked when we joined the BC Federation of Labour. Delegates are bound at convention and can't vote their conscience. And there is not the kind of free and open debate we have come to expect. The BCTF has democratic culture and in keeping with that culture we elected a leader [BCTF President Ginnie Sims] who is very focused on democracy... She could not just go ahead and sell us out – not that she would. Some people

were expecting Ginnie Sims would be forced to make a backroom deal. She actually said to me, 'It was difficult to stand up to the pressure.'

What is next? In the spring, the teachers' CUPE colleagues (non-teaching school employees, who refused to cross teachers' picket lines) could be out again. Lisa says she believes teachers will honour CUPE pickets, even though the strike cost them \$2,000 to \$3,000 last time with no concrete gains.

HEALTH WORKERS EXEC CUT A DEAL

Gretchen Dulmage, vice-chair of the Health Employees' Union local at Women's and Children's Hospital and a member of Solidarity Caucus, compared her experiences in the 2004 HEU strike. 43,000 health care workers were legislated back to work after four days of picketing, but continued to strike until the union executive cut a deal [under pressure from the BC Fed leaders], which was, Gretchen says, "way worse than the deal we had rejected a year earlier."

The union avoided putting the deal to a vote of the membership saying it was not a contract negotiation or a strike, but an illegal protest and negotiations with the government over legislation.

She asked, "Why did they settle for a deal that was so bad?" Labour leaders were not ready for the BC Liberals' no-holds-barred efforts to break the power of unions, and the public sector unions in particular, she said. This, "after we had put ourselves on the line, said we were ready to go to jail and lose out jobs."

Today, Gretchen sees something more heartening. "I saw something different with the teachers. Ginnie Sims stayed out for far longer under [the government's] pressure than our leaders. She insisted there was going to be a vote, and the membership – and nobody else – decides."

The HEU contract is up on March 31. Gretchen feels that members are quite determined. "We are really indebted to

Those of us who are active in our unions need to look at the transformation of each of our unions as a necessary step by which the Fed begins to change.
Will Offley

The most exciting incidence of class war I have ever experienced inside Canada or South Africa.
Laurence Boxall

BCTF members for standing firm. It shows you can push a little further." Gretchen emphasized that "the only weapon workers have to win their demands is the strike, and if unions forget that, we are in deep trouble."

CEP union member Laurence Boxall described the teachers strike as "the most exciting incidence of class war I have ever experienced inside Canada or South Africa." Teachers told him, "I don't like to do stuff that is illegal. But I have no choice. I owe it to my students."

This time, the role of the labour leadership was "transparent." BC Fed president Jim Sinclair went on the media talking about a teachers' pact to return to work before the BCTF had even heard about it.

What needs to be done? According to Laurence, "We need to build to build a rank and file movement... We need to change both the structure and leadership of the BC Fed" and heal the rift between union and community from the betrayal of Solidarity in 1983, as well as fight privatization at all levels. Stressing that the power of solidarity is the main tool of struggle, he called on unions to join March 18 protests against the war in Iraq.

TRANSFORMING THE UNION MOVEMENT

Will Offley said he was speaking for himself not the BCNU, although he hopes to convince the union of his positions. "The process of transforming the Fed and ending the string of betrayals that have taken place over the last number of years is an organic process."

Will argued it was not just a problem

of a clique at the top but "a social layer, tightly interconnected, aware of and defensive of its own interests... Those of us who are active in our unions need to look at the transformation of each of our unions as a necessary step by which the Fed begins to change."

What accounted for the difference in the outcome of the teachers' and HEU strikes, and the difference in the morale in the labour movement after the strikes?

Will pointed to the unity of the teachers, which catalyzed an immense degree of support among the population as a whole and among other unionists.

He also said it was a "textbook case" of a union being transformed in two weeks of struggle, with members' consciousness being permanently changed.

For Will, "the strike was a just cause." He said the teachers' demands in terms of working conditions and maintenance of public education made it possible to win the support of the majority of the population of BC. "Teachers were not seen as greedy public sector workers holding the public to ransom but as defenders of our children and our future."

He said, "We need to find a way to fuse our demands of working conditions, benefits and wages with the need to deliver the public services that the population of BC needs." He added, "We saw the unity that came from the democratic organizing of the BCTF and democratic control of the membership."

Will pointed to the role of grassroots activists. In Victoria, the Community Solidarity Coalition shut down much of the city to support teachers. "They were the ones who knew the work sites, the shift times, the entrances. The Fed had to ask them for information. The Fed didn't know how to do it. They were the backbone of the action. We need to take this into account in our organizing, whether we are union members or not."★

We expect that type of democracy. The BCTF has democratic culture and we elected a president who is very focused on democracy.

Lisa Descary

We are really indebted to BCTF members for standing firm. It shows you can push a little further.

Gretchen Dulmage

(Re)imagining Canadian nationalism

BY HARSHA WALIA

This article is a continuation of *New Socialist's* ongoing discussion of **Canada and Empire**. The next issue will feature a contribution from *Canadian Dimension* editor Cy Gonick. Other contributions to the discussion are welcome.

The various articles in the *New Socialist* special issue on “Canada and Empire” offer a powerful critique of Canadian left-nationalism and the ways in which it serves as a shield against examining Canada’s own policies of oppression both within and beyond its borders.

Canada is thought to be a peaceful and compassionate society. Internationally, Canada is seen as the peacekeeper. Most Canadians perceive the US as the greatest threat to and oppressor of the dependent and helpless Canadian nation. For example, the Council of Canadians over the past few years has used the slogan of “Canada: Country or Colony?” to point to military, border and trade integration agreements, suggesting that Canada is in a colonial relationship with the US. The myth of Canadian benevolence and the veneer of Canadian multiculturalism has further perpetuated the illusion of being the Northern underdog and served to cast Canada as a liberal counterpoint to US imperialism.

However, as the various articles in the last issue of *New Socialist* reveal, the very foundation of Canada is built on the blood and holocaust of indigenous peoples. Cree lawyer Sharon Venne has written, “Canada, the great peacekeeping nation, must maintain its international image because its treatment of Indigenous Peoples makes its human rights record as black as the record of

white South Africa. After all, the legislation to keep blacks down in South Africa was modeled upon legislation drafted and used in Canada against Indigenous Peoples.”

Slavery has historically been practiced in Canada and its present-day manifestation continues with an apartheid system of labour in which migrants are legislated into vulnerability and invisibility in order to provide a hyper-exploitable pool of labour without rights of settlement or social/political enfranchisement. On the global stage, while the US is perceived as having been the sole imperialist hegemonic power over the past six decades, Canada has lent its support to imperialism – through complicity and overt support – in Vietnam, East Timor, Afghanistan, Haiti, Palestine and Iraq.

Finally, contrary to popular Left sentiment, Canada is no less favorable to corporate rule than the US. The better social benefits such as public healthcare enjoyed in Canada as compared with those in the US are not due to the goodwill of any progressive Canadian government; in reality, they are a product of past working-class struggles.

This reality of Canadian capitalism, colonialism and imperialism is well articulated throughout the articles in the last issue of *New Socialist*. As David McNally writes, “This is the ugly face of a middle level imperialist power that pretends that, because it lacks the aggressive capacity of US imperialism, it has no imperialist interests of its own.” Sebastian Lamb further writes on this blind spot of the Canadian Left: “when we break out of

the narrow perspective that looks at Canada mainly in relation to the US instead of placing Canada in relation to the entire global system, we can appreciate how Canadian capitalists and governments are globally dominant, not dominated.”

NATIONALISM OF THE OPPRESSOR, NATIONALISM OF THE OPPRESSED

These articles offer a nuanced understanding of Canadian nationalism by implicitly distinguishing the “oppressor nationalism” of Canada from the “nationalisms of the oppressed.” The nationalism of the oppressed has often been characterized as “anti-statist nationalism” as it embodies the shared identity and collective feelings, thought and behaviour of a community often without geographic, economic or political boundaries. As Alfredo M. Bonanno writes, “Nationality is not a principle; it is a legitimate fact, just as individuality is. Every nationality, great or small, has the incontestable right to be itself, to live according to its own nature. This right is simply the corollary of the general principle of freedom.”

Such nationalist movements express a popular anti-colonial sentiment and provide a platform for oppressed peoples to organize against imperialism, as witnessed by historical national liberation struggles across the Third World. Although nationalist movements have historically imitated and led to statist forms of organization – for example, the partition of India and Pakistan has manufactured a patriotic and fundamentalist defense of these arbitrarily defined states – other nationalist trajectories of self-determination are possible as witnessed through the Zapatista structures of governance in Chiapas.

This nationalism of the oppressed is

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quite unlike Canadian statist nationalism, which is itself predicated on the arbitrary existence of the Canadian state – a legal and political community and socially-constructed identity established by deliberate action. State formation has historically served to displace the free confederations of tribes and communities, and the Canadian state has attempted to create a cultural nation of its own by denying the nationhood of indigenous peoples that constitutes it.

CANADIAN NATIONALISM AND BORDER CONTROLS

“All borders are acts of state violence inscribed in landscape. Every wall and fence, checkpoint and pillbox, is a sundering of the integrity of nature and the rights of man. The very existence of exclusionary borders, as all great radical thinkers have understood, constitutes a permanent crisis of human liberty.”

Mike Davis & Alessandra Moctezuma

Canadian nationalism emphasizes the nation as a contained entity threatened by outside forces wishing to destroy it and its members. Borders have been presented as a site through which criminality is able to seep into the state. As Margaret Beare put it, “the imagery is often of floodgates giving way in front of a sea of criminals, as waves of immigrants enter the country.” This state-building exercise requires ways to legitimize the global apartheid system of regulating citizenship. One way this is done is to create a public consciousness about the “undesirable migrant”: a welfare bum, a criminal, a terrorist.

Yet the reality of migration is one that reveals the asymmetrical relations between “rich” and “poor,” between North and South, where the effects of colonialism and corporate globalization have created political economies that compel people to move. Still, within the

Canadian nationalist discourse, the Canadian state is perceived as a bulwark of necessary protection, and the illusion of the state as a place of safety is maintained through bureaucratic organizations – such as the military, federal intelligence and immigration apparatus – which produce the sense that “The Enemy” is outside the realm of “us.” Catherine Dauvergne has written, “one reason why the concept of ‘national interest’ is so vital to immigration law is because of the role this law plays in constituting the nation.” Immigration law determines who becomes part of the Canadian community. The impetus towards cracking down on migration therefore demonstrates Canada asserting its sovereignty and control.

The ongoing use of the dichotomous rhetoric of “us and them” – particularly after the events of 9/11 – is rooted in the colonial legacy that makes racially-oppressed communities “The Enemy” that can then only exist outside of the nation. For example, during World War Two, Japanese Canadians were designated as “enemy aliens” and over 22,000 were relocated or interned. Similarly, despite the fact that Canada is home to many of Arab origin, because the racialized image of “The Enemy” after 9/11 includes all Arabs, the notion of the Canadian nation must necessarily exclude Arab-Canadians. This then justifies their treatment as hyphenated citizens – a group excluded from, and in opposition to, the Canadian nation. By comparison, after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing by far right white supremacists there was no profiling or registration system of white men aged 18-45.

This normalization of whiteness within the Canadian state allows for the unfettered and unchallenged consequences of the “War on Terrorism”. This includes massive arrests and the interrogation of immigrants and refugees, the passing of

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legislation granting intelligence and law enforcement agencies much broader powers of intrusion into people’s private lives, pervasive government and media censorship of information, the silencing of dissent and the widespread racial profiling and criminalization of Muslim, Arab and South Asian communities. Security certificates have been used to arbitrarily detain five Muslim men on secret evidence in complete defiance of their basic civil rights. Legislation such as the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* and the *Anti-Terrorism Act* has strengthened the association between terrorism and immigration.

Therefore Canadian nationalism cannot simply mean sovereignty from the United States. As Samir Hussain has written, “simply ‘being better’ than the United States of America (or ‘American citizens’) is hardly a cause for celebration – indeed, this is not a difficult achievement.” It must also mean autonomy, popular sovereignty and full self-determination for all those who occupy the territories of Canada, particularly indigenous peoples and racialized migrants.

Sajej Henderson argues that “the more people become aware of the conditionality of a context, the more likely they are able to effect meaningful change to that context.” Rather than awkwardly embracing a Canadian nationalism that emphasizes the state’s absolute and hierarchical authority, we must articulate and defend the importance of maintaining free, equal and reciprocal relations between all human beings and the land. Such relationships, along with a more global and comprehensive analysis of colonialism, capitalism and racism create the battleground for building a broad and powerful revolutionary grassroots movement. ★

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The legacies of national liberation

BY DAVID FINKEL

To grasp the changes that the national liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s produced, suppose first that you were looking at a world atlas circa 1960. On the continent of Africa alone, you'd find countries with names like Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, South West Africa, French Equatorial Guinea, Belgian Congo and the like. The transformation from that map to Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, etc. far transcends the names on paper – it marked practically a new epoch, a change every bit as profound as the collapse of Stalinism and the 1990s transition from the Cold War to corporate globalization.

Some aspects of the transformation were not anticipated by classical Marxist theories of imperialism, which had developed in the wake of the late 19th century carving up of the world into colonial empires. For decades thereafter it was assumed that what Lenin called “the highest stage of capitalism” *required* colonial empire, whether for the looting of raw materials or the export of capital from the metropolitan center. Based on this understanding, it appeared that those competing colonial empires would be dismantled only under the impact of international socialist revolution.

We should state at the outset that for Marxists, the right of nations to self-determination is important for several reasons. First, it is a legitimate democratic right, valid in and of itself whether or not it has direct revolutionary implications. Second, it is often a necessary condition for independent class politics, because the working class in an oppressed or colonized nation tends to see itself having interests in common with “its own” native capitalist class. Third, the struggle for national liberation may indeed bring revolutionary possibilities to the fore both in the oppressed nation and in the oppressor state. In any case, as Marx noted long ago in the case of Britain and Ireland, no working class can free itself while it is a participant in subjugating another people.

By 1960, in any case, the process of decolonization was underway – dismantling the European empires that had carved up much of the globe at the end of the 19th century

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Colonial southern Africa

and had dragged civilization into two world wars. Sometimes the colonial power ceded sovereignty to local elites more or less peacefully, in other cases after years of violent struggle, but in general without social or even political revolution in the imperial power.

Algeria was just achieving independence from France after years of insurgency and bloody repression. The British protectorate in Iraq had been overthrown shortly before (1958). What remained of French as well as British imperial rule in the Middle East had pretty well disintegrated (except the remnant of British-controlled Aden) when the US Eisenhower administration forced them to abandon their joint conquest, with Israel, of the Suez Canal (1956).

Back in Africa, at the southern tip of your 1960 map you'd find the “Union of South Africa.” It was about to separate from the British Commonwealth and rename itself a “Republic” in defiance of worldwide condemnation of apartheid. In appearance, South Africa was globally isolated; in reality, investment was pouring in as international capital saw “stability” following apartheid’s greatest success, the Sharpeville massacre.

The last of the more-or-less intact colonial dominions in Africa was that of the “Portuguese overseas provinces” Angola, Mozambique and Guinea (now Guinea-Bissau) as well as the Cape Verde Islands, Macao, Sao Tome and Principe Islands, and East Timor. While claiming these colonies as “provinces,” Portugal was among the worst of the

European powers in exploiting its possessions for raw materials while doing nothing to build an infrastructure, economic development or civil service for independent nations to inherit. Only Belgium, with its unspeakable history of genocide and pillage in the Congo, might claim a more vicious record.

Portugal's tenacity in holding its African possessions – as one Portuguese revolutionary socialist would call it, “the last to leave” – was closely related to the reality of its condition as the most backward of the remaining colonial powers. The liberation struggles of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau would feed back into the revolutionary upheaval that would shake Portugal itself – and for one hopeful moment, would even threaten the stability of capital in Western Europe – in 1974-75. That runs a little ahead of our story, however.

If backward Portugal was an anachronism as classic colonialism was declining, a new paradigm had emerged, centered in the world's most powerful imperialist state, the United States of America. US imperialism had pretty well perfected the new science of global exploitation without formal colonies. The USA of course had its own colonies, notably Puerto Rico, but its domination, in Latin America above all, could now be exercised through officially independent but bought-and-paid-for client regimes. This was in general a highly effective strategy, in which massive profits for metropolitan capital were guaranteed by local legal and repressive client machineries – with the power of the US army, navy and Marines well over the horizon to be employed only as the last resort.

It was a successful model, especially at the height of the long postwar capitalist boom, but not without its own difficulties. In our very “backyard” the Cuban revolution of 1959, initially encouraged by Washington on the assumption that an incompetent dictatorship would be replaced by a reliable capitalist coalition government, by 1960 was looking like an unwelcome development. And in another part of the world about which few Americans knew much of anything, “Indochina,” the United States had taken over the management of a country from which French colonialism had been recently expelled – Vietnam.

NATIONAL LIBERATION AND THE LEFT

Let's shift from a global perspective to a few critical struggles which dramatically shaped the thinking of the 1960s and 1970s left, keeping in mind that terms like “national liberation,” “national independence” and even “Third World liberation” were used more or less interchangeably.

(To focus the discussion, I am going to mostly leave aside

some important cases of what is sometimes called “internal colonialism” – the Basque nation in Spain, for example – and the question of “settler-colonial” societies such as Israel/Palestine, about which I have previously written for *New Socialist*. In addition, I won't touch upon one crucially important national independence movement in our own continent of North America – Quebec – for the obvious reason that *New Socialist* has access to much more expert analysis of this long struggle.)

First, the Black community in North America drew profound inspiration from the attainment of independence of the new African states. It's noteworthy that Malcolm X, after his separation from the Nation of Islam, called his new organization the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), a name drawn from the Organization of African Unity formed by the African states (OAU, recently renamed the African Union).

It was important at least symbolically that the United Nations ceased to be strictly a rich countries' club and began to look like the composition of the world's peoples. Nina Simone, in “Backlash Blues,” culminated her lecture to “Mr. Backlash” (i.e. white racism) with the classic line “The world is full of folks like me/ Who are Black, Red, Yellow and Brown/ Mr. Backlash, I'm gonna leave with the backlash blues.”

The Civil Rights Movement in the American South developed many of its tactics from the mass defiance campaigns of South Africa,

and from an interpretation of Gandhian nonviolent resistance in India against British colonialism. As the radical wing of this movement moved toward Black Power and Black Liberation, including the right of armed self-defense (from Robert F. Williams and the Deacons for Defense to the Black Panther Party), additional sources of inspiration were found in the Cuban and Chinese revolutions as well as armed African liberation struggles.

To be sure, each of these models carried their own contradictions. An absolute insistence on nonviolence, which made a lot of tactical sense in the struggle under conditions of state and Ku Klux Klan terror in the US South, could become a fetish and even alienate part of the movement – as was seen in the angry rejection by many African Americans in the North to Martin Luther King's statement, “If blood must flow, let it be ours.”

But armed struggle could become a fetish too, and not only in the US. An element of armed self-defense for populations under severe repression and terror – African Americans, indigenous peoples in the United States or Canada, the Nationalist (Catholic) community in Northern Ireland, or the Palestinian people under occupation in their

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homeland and severe oppression in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon etc. – was precisely that: a necessary defensive component in a larger political struggle.

Tragically, this dynamic bred the illusion that liberation itself could be achieved by an armed vanguard that would free Black people, drive Britain out of the north of Ireland, defeat Zionism, etc. The results of this expectation of armed revolutionary victory were often incredibly destructive (think of the fate of the Black Panther Party, for example, or in the context of the Canadian state the tragedy of the FLQ. When white New Leftists with no social base adopted the notion of “picking up the gun,” the outcome was even more hideous).

The larger point here, however, is that the US Black community has always been more internationalist in its thinking than the population as a whole. The 1960s revival of the US left began with the inspiration drawn from Civil Rights and Black Liberation, movements that already saw themselves as part of an international struggle. And since the Black struggle itself is very much that of an oppressed nation (or nationality, if you prefer that language) within the US, one can say that a national liberation struggle at the heart of US society was central to the recomposition of the 1960s and 70s left.

Beyond this, of course, one struggle above all others dominated the movements of the decade 1965-’75: Vietnam. Here, in contrast to its own postcolonial paradigm, US imperialism had taken over management of the country after the French were defeated and now attempted to suppress Vietnamese aspirations for unity and independence by the direct application of overwhelming military force. The results of this failure would prevent a repetition for almost thirty years – until the messianic-imperial presidential administration of George W. Bush decided that conquering Iraq would begin a transformation of the Middle East...but again, we’re getting ahead.

WHAT VIETNAM TAUGHT US

It’s difficult to convey a full sense of the transformative role of the Vietnam War, but some of the critical dimensions can be briefly described.

THE CONTEXT OF THE COLD WAR. The frozen polarization of the 1950s between the East and West blocs was thawing in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split* and the “normalizing” of US-Soviet rivalry after the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis, but in US domestic politics the discourse of the Communist Menace still loomed even larger than today’s debate-choking threat of Global Terrorism.

The Role of Liberalism. The massive escalation of US mili-

tary power in Vietnam from 1964 on, and the bombing of South Vietnam that preceded it, were carried out not by today’s right-wing Republicans but by the liberal Democratic administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. **RACE, CLASS AND WAR.** The United States in Vietnam fielded an army of hundreds of thousands of conscripts, drafted from the working class, Black and Latino populations who did not have college student deferments or other escape routes from the draft.

POLITICS OF NATIONALISM. With the Tet offensive of Spring 1968, it became clear to the US public and to political elites that the war could not be “won,” not only because the conscript army was disintegrating on the ground but because of the power of nationalism: The population of South Vietnam had unified in support of the National Liberation Front (NLF) against the US occupation, whether or not they supported the Communist Party that controlled the NLF.

MASS STRUGGLE. Students for a Democratic Society called the first national demonstration for immediate withdrawal, in 1965, and shortly found itself at the forefront of the radical wing of a mass antiwar movement. The fear and loathing of the draft created a huge draft resistance struggle on the campuses and antiwar coffeehouses, and by the late 1960s strong antiwar sentiment had surfaced within the active duty military ranks. All this coincided with the Black urban uprisings and the rise of Women’s Liberation – and stirrings of rank and file discontent in the unions.

What did all this mean for a Left that was just reviving? Many lessons were learned in an incredibly short time, some positive and others deeply contradictory. To list a few:

(i) First and foremost, it was incredibly liberating to learn that the overwhelming power of the American empire could be challenged – and defeated! Nothing in our immediate experience had prepared us for this: There had been the Bay of Pigs in 1961**, of course, but for the US military itself to be defeated in direct battle with a small nation fighting for its independence was unprecedented and awesome.

(ii) American public opinion itself was not monolithic: People could be moved by a combination of moral argumentation and the impact of the human and economic costs of military adventure. Tens of thousands of soldiers returning in body bags mattered, of course, as well as the onset of war-induced inflation; but so did the My Lai massacre of Vietnamese villagers by US troops and the image of the young girl fleeing with her clothes burned off by napalm.

The Vietnam war brought down two US administrations, that of Lyndon Johnson and ultimately Richard Nixon as

The activists of the 1960s learned powerful lessons about the imperialist character of liberalism and the Democratic Party – realities that are harder for a newer generation to comprehend when today’s atrocities-in-the-name-of-”freedom” are perpetrated by far-right Republicans.

Protests by students and other activists in the US and internationally were instrumental in bringing about an end to the American war in Vietnam.

well. The Watergate crimes that destroyed Nixon were the direct result, after all, of the “Plumbers Unit” created within the bowels of Nixon’s regime to stop the leak of unfavorable information about an unpopular war. Any resemblance to the recently revealed antics of the George W. Bush gang are strictly uncoincidental.

(iii) The antiwar and left activists of the 1960s learned powerful lessons about the imperialist character of liberalism and the Democratic Party – realities that are harder for a newer generation to comprehend when today’s atrocities-in-the-name-of-”freedom” are perpetrated by far-right Republicans. That’s one reason it’s important to study the 1960s: Today’s John Kerry, Hilary Clinton and Joe Lieberman Democrats who oppose the struggle for immediate withdrawal from Iraq are very much in continuity with their party’s history, even if they are out of touch with their own antiwar voting base.

(iv) In dealing with the question of Communism, the Left began to successfully challenge the national consensus that any country or movement, external or internal, that might be run by Communists was deserving of destruction at the hands of US power. Indeed, for the whole US population, the Cold War myth that “losing” Vietnam would cause “falling dominoes” all over Asia suffered huge blows in this struggle. This experience was also contradictory for the Left, however.

Most regrettably, much of the left itself became suffused with the notion that Stalinist parties, like the Vietnamese Communist Party, were vehicles for liberation – not just national liberation but even “socialism.” This notion not only separated the radical Left from most of the US working class population, but was enormously disorienting. For example, it was common to assume that the North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist regimes were fighting shoulder to shoulder in an “anti-imperialist, anti-revisionist front.” In the real world, by 1966-67 these two regimes and parties hated each other, especially as Beijing blocked Soviet aid from reaching Vietnam (to say nothing of how the lunatic factional warfare of the Cultural Revolution was seen by Vietnamese Communists).

Further, taking the Vietnamese leadership as a political model attracted much of the anti-imperialist Left to Stalinist methods. For example, the NLF in southern Vietnam presented itself as a broadly representative national movement. On paper that’s what it was, and its official program promised to preserve southern autonomy and political pluralism following the victory. Real power, however, rested in a Communist Party that was fiercely committed to uniting Vietnam under its own single-party rule. Some on the US Left who understood these realities drew the conclusion that this kind of manipulation was the way to do politics, with disastrous results.



(v) The successful Vietnamese war against the imperialist occupation generated both a certain worship of guerrilla war as THE strategy for revolutionary victory (here again, the Vietnamese and Chinese experiences were absurdly conflated), and a world view sometimes called “Third Worldism,” according to which the revolutionary masses of the Third World would surround and overwhelm the rich countries with their “bought-off and privileged” working classes. (It must be said here that the Vietnamese Communists themselves didn’t make any such argument, although the Maoist regime in China pretended to believe something of the sort, for the benefit of its foreign admirers. But in essence this was a homegrown delusion.)

(vi) The Third-Worldist illusion fed back into the US Left’s attempts to come to grips with the most important question confronting us – understanding and changing our own society. As noted above, a wing of the Civil Rights movement had evolved to Black Power and toward revolutionary politics; and anger in northern Black communities over police brutality, economic apartheid and the Vietnam war produced a wave of ghetto rebellions. It was entirely correct to see in these developments a potential social insurgency, one which could draw in sectors of militant Black workers as a vanguard of the overall US working class.

It was disastrously mistaken, however, for either white or African American revolutionaries to see this as the actual beginning of a revolution in which the (mythical) Black revolutionary masses represented the extension of the (mythical) Third World revolution into a corrupted and decadent American society. Implicitly or explicitly, the idea arose that the revolution would be carried through by a minority, aided by the enlightened revolutionary elite who allied themselves with the Third World, against the wishes and interests of the

reactionary (basically, white working class) majority.

Based on this illusion, much of the 1960s Left passed rapidly into extreme social isolation followed by self-destruction, utter demoralization or an astoundingly rapid relapse into liberalism. Obviously this compresses and simplifies a complex and important history, but in a nutshell this was the rise and tragic failure of the New Left.

FROM VIETNAM TO CENTRAL AMERICA

America's war in Vietnam was essentially lost by spring 1968, yet the carnage continued till the "fall of Saigon" in 1975. Indeed more Vietnamese probably died between 1969 and 1975 than in the preceding six years – a cautionary lesson for the struggle to end the Iraq war today.

The end of the Vietnam era, however, brought a new wave of liberation struggles and solidarity movements. Portugal was the strongest example of a genuine organic alliance between liberation movements in the colonies and revolutionary militants in the colonial country, in which the victory of the former set in motion a process that very nearly culminated in a workers' revolution in Portugal itself.

For the North American Left, however, the next truly formative experience of national liberation and solidarity came with the Nicaraguan upheaval of 1977-79 and the Sandinista triumph of July 19, 1979. This opened the wave of Central American popular revolutionary struggles (El Salvador and Guatemala especially), which produced the best solidarity organizing in this writer's experience in the US Left.

The fact that the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) today, after fifteen years of defeat, has become a thoroughly cynical political party in a corrupt partnership with the right wing must not blind us to the enormous hope that the FSLN's victory had opened up. Indeed the fact that the Sandinista social base, against all odds and practically without leadership, continues the struggle for social justice, in itself confirms the enduring power of that revolutionary impulse.

The Central American revolutionary movements at their best combined the necessary military struggle against death squads and client governments of US imperialism with powerful social mobilizations of workers', peasants', indigenous, women's and community organizations. Powerful solidarity linkages were built between Central and North American communities, whether through churches, labor groups or solidarity committees. A strong Sanctuary movement arose in US and Canadian cities to shield our brothers

and sisters fleeing from death squads – a movement in which thousands of ordinary citizens told the US government: Your laws and your war are crimes against humanity, and you can shove them.

Critical lessons came out of these years of activism. First, while defending the right of oppressed people to engage in armed struggle is an important principle, the level of solidarity with Central America surpassed by far anything that could have been built to support military struggle alone. Second, more than in previous movements, we began to see the importance of US immigrant communities (Salvadoran and Guatemalan in this case) playing a vital role in struggle both for their homelands and inside the US. Third, as inspiring as they were, these movements could not ultimately triumph against overwhelming US-financed-and-organized repression and mass murder, without US society forcing significant changes on government policy.

The experience of the Central American revolutions and solidarity movements were a vast improvement on the militarist "Third Worldism" that arose in the course of the Vietnam-era Left (and the wave of guerillaist enthusiasm inspired by Che Guevara in the same general period). Certainly, the memory remained of the victory of Vietnam against the full might of US imperialism. But that had not been ultimately a victory of guerrilla war in itself; the NLF had been backed up by the powerful conventional army of North Vietnam, which finally won the war, and this in turn could count on open-ended support (whatever you thought of the politics) from the Soviet Union.

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NATIONAL LIBERATION TODAY: AFRICA TO IRAQ

Finally, then, the end of the Cold War and final collapse of the Soviet Union changed – among many other things -- the context in which today's liberation struggles must operate. Some on the Left regard this change as an unmitigated disaster, but the actual record is mixed. In fact, the disappearance of "the Communist menace" meant that US imperialism no longer had a stake in defending to the bitter end, for example, apartheid in South Africa, Mobutu's kleptocracy in Zaire or the Suharto gangster dictatorship in Indonesia. At the same time, particularly after 9/11, US imperialism has engaged in a level of aggression in the name of the "Global War on Terror" which was practically unimaginable in the decades of relatively stable "superpower rivalry."

To end this overly hasty overview, I would point to three crucial aspects of today's realities pertaining to the legacies and the future of national liberation struggles. These should not be seen as finished conclusions, but as bare sketches

pointing to important new discussions.

(1) First, we need to understand that the right of national self-determination remains as valid as ever in the new global capitalism – but it is not synonymous with socialism. Indeed, national independence by itself doesn't resolve fundamental issues that can only be addressed on the basis of working class power. As John Saul puts it in his important and thoughtful new book, *The Next Liberation Struggle* (2005), examining the legacies of Africa's liberation struggles: "We also know that the liberation of Southern Africa has fulfilled little of the promise of negating the counter-developmental hegemony of global capitalism that revolutionary nationalism in the ex-Portuguese colonies and Zimbabwe and a working-class-driven transformation in South Africa seemed possibly to portend."

South Africa is indeed a case in point here. The African National Congress has been the democratically elected government for a decade and more now; yet the majority of Black South Africans are poorer than before under the impact of neoliberal privatization schemes embraced by the ANC at the dictates of international capital.

In Zimbabwe, obviously, the picture is unimaginably worse. Nothing could more graphically illustrate the disastrous consequences of the single-party state and one-man rule than the degeneration of ZANU-PF from the liberation movement of the 1970s to today's fascist gangster cult. Robert Mugabe, who should have been his country's Nelson Mandela, has instead become its Papa Doc*** – something especially painful for those of us who engaged in political solidarity and fundraising for ZANU during the liberation war.

(2) Today's struggles of nations in "the global South" obviously have everything to do with the issues of "Free Trade" and corporate globalization. By their very nature, these struggles cannot be fought by individual nations on their own. They absolutely require alliances and blocs of nations on the sharp end of the "Free Trade" stick, and they require linkages with the global justice movements that have erupted since the Seattle events of 1999.

With some important exceptions such as the above-mentioned Puerto Rico, classic colonies are mainly a thing of the past. What we see today is the onset of a promising anti-neoliberal revolt. Whether or not they fit into the standard definition of "national liberation struggles," we must look to the Bolivian indigenous people's revolt against water privatization, Guatemala's indigenous resistance to the ravages of the (Canadian-based) Glamis gold mining corporation, and the "Bolivarian Revolution" of Venezuela under president Hugo Chavez, as expressions of the growing resistance.

In no way, incidentally, do I mean here to identify Chavez's government with socialism-from-below (least of all is it based on structures of working class power!). It is important to recognize, however, that what initially appeared as a kind of retro-populist caudillo politics has gone much further in opening space for popular mobilization – ironically, at the same time that the Workers Party government in Brazil, elected on the strength of labor and social movements, is trying

to shut that space down. History remains full of surprises.

(3) Finally, we come to the Bush gang's rampage through Afghanistan and Iraq. Seizing upon the opportunity afforded by 9/11, this administration assigned itself a messianic mandate: to "make the Middle East what Latin America used to be, a big American lake" as my friend Sam Farber aptly put it. The plan, of course, was a whole banquet of "regime change" with Afghanistan as the appetizer, Iraq the soup, Iran the main course and then Syria for dessert. As we now know, it's all gone down the windpipe the wrong way.

The lesson so far is catastrophic all around. Far from demonstrating unlimited power, US imperialism is choking on Iraq. But the picture is not pretty for "our side" either. The traditional forces of national liberation – the left, the labor movement, progressive Arab nationalism – are virtually prostrate in Iraq and the Arab world generally. This has left the field of resistance mainly to Baathist, Islamist or religious-totalitarian fanatic forces.

The dynamic of the "global war on terror" has best been described by the Marxist author Gilbert Achcar as a symbiotic "clash of barbarisms," in which the "counter-barbarism" of religious-fanatic terrorism feeds on the catastrophic destruction of small nations and the world's poor by uncontrolled imperial military and corporate domination.

In some bizarre sense, we seem to have come full circle. In an age where classic colonial conquest had become an anachronism, the imperial state that virtually invented and perfected "neocolonialism" has brutally reminded us that naked military conquest and looting of resources (for the natives' good, of course, not our own greed) remains on the agenda.

With old questions of self-determination still unresolved and so many new ones from "free trade" to catastrophic climate change on the agenda, the new century promises to be as turbulent as the last. ★

ENDNOTES

* The Sino-Soviet split, beginning around 1959-'60, was the breakup of the alliance between the Communist parties of the Soviet Union and China. Ostensibly the Chinese CP adopted a strongly left and "anti-revisionist" stance; but by the 1970s China's rulers demonstrated their trajectory toward allying with the United States.

** The Bay of Pigs, on the Cuban coast, was the site of a 1961 CIA-organized landing by an armed expeditionary force of Cuban exiles intending to create a counterrevolutionary insurrection. The effort collapsed when it received no popular support and the Kennedy administration retreated from its promise to provide air support. The debacle was an enormous embarrassment for U.S. imperialism.

*** "Papa Doc," Francois Duvalier, was the kleptocratic and murderous ruler of Haiti from 1957-71, when he was succeeded by his son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc." The Duvalier family was notorious for its lavish living at the expense of the poorest nation in the western hemisphere.

Indigenous resurgence and the new warrior

It is time for our people to live again. This writing is a journey on the path made for us by those who have found a way to live as *Onkwehonwe*, original people. The journey is a living commitment to meaningful change in our lives and to transforming society by recreating our existences, regenerating our cultures, and surging against the forces that keep us bound to our colonial past. It is the path of struggle laid out by those who have come before us; now it is our turn, we who choose to turn away from the legacies of colonialism and take on the challenge of creating a new reality for ourselves and for our people.

The journey and this warrior's path is a kind of *Wasáse*, a ceremony of unity, strength, and commitment to action. *Wasáse* is an ancient Rotinoshonni (Iroquois Confederacy) war ritual, the Thunder Dance. The new warrior's path, the spirit of *Wasáse*, this *Onkwehonwe* attitude, this courageous way of being in the world – all come together to form a new politics in which many identities and strategies for making change are fused together in a movement to challenge white society's control over *Onkwehonwe* and our lands.

Wasáse, as I am speaking of it here, is symbolic of the social and cultural force alive among *Onkwehonwe* dedicated to altering the balance of political and economic power to recreate some social and physical space for freedom to re-emerge. *Wasáse* is an ethical and political vision, the real demonstration of our resolve to survive as *Onkwehonwe* and to

Taiiaki Alfred has been called by my indigenous collaborators in Winnipeg a true “pan-indigenous leader.” Firmly rooted in his own Kanien’kehaka (Mohawk) heritage, his recent writings and orations also appeal to all indigenous peoples and their non-indigenous allies on the Left to build a radical alternative to this society divided by race, class and gender. This is the task of the warrior described in his recently published book *Wasáse: Indigenous Paths of Action and Freedom*. As Alfred put it in a recent lecture at the University of Manitoba, “Given the reality we face in the communities, how could you not want to be a warrior?”

It is no coincidence that the cover image for *Wasáse* closely parallels the poster of Malcolm X titled “By Any Means Necessary.” Alfred follows in the footsteps of Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon and Howard Adams, while at the same time aiming to develop a collectivized strategy for resurgence that is rooted in the contemporary experiences of aboriginal communities.

Alfred's own history has been one of intensive experiential learning, informed by elders whose formative political experience was the Red Power movement of the 1970s; by his experience as a Marine in Honduras; by his participation in the Kanien’kehaka movement to achieve economic self-sufficiency through extra-legal means; by the rebellion at Oka Quebec in 1990; and by his subsequent involvement in self-government negotiations. Each of his publications has marked significant evolution of his thinking in dialogue with other indigenous activists in Canada and beyond about the nature of self-determination, as well as an expanded understanding of the crucial role that aboriginal youth will play in leading the movements for change.

In a recent note about his contribution to this magazine, Alfred wrote of his hope that “some day soon our shared commitments and views and values will form the basis of a new movement to displace the collaborationists and capitalists that have become our ‘leaders.’” The protests against the recent First Ministers Meeting on Aboriginal Affairs were an indicator that such a movement can be built; now is the time for socialists to deepen our understanding of aboriginal oppression in Canada in order to build solidarity in fighting it.

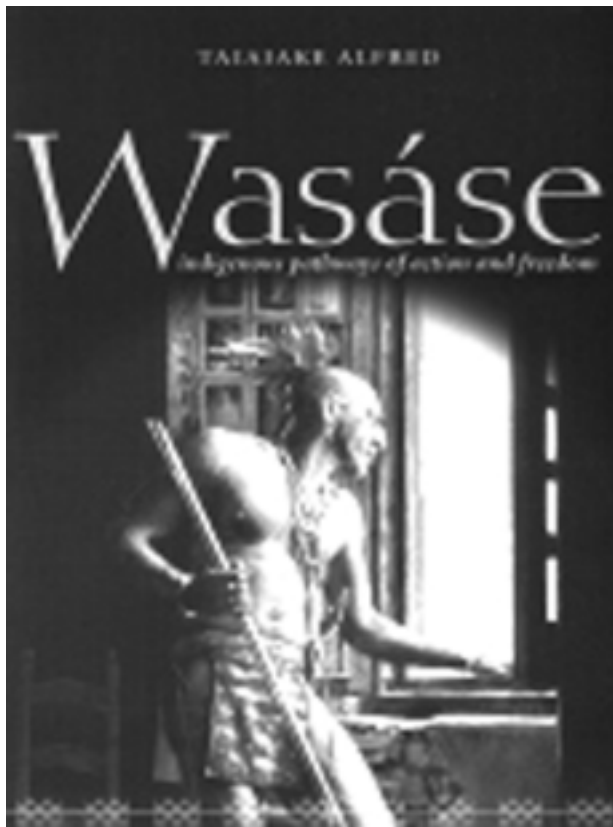
Deborah Simmons

do what we must to force the Settlers to acknowledge our existence and the integrity of our connection to the land.

There are many differences among the peoples that are indigenous to this land, yet the challenge facing all *Onkwehonwe*

is the same: regaining freedom and becoming self-sufficient by confronting the disconnection and fear at the core of our existences under colonial dominion. We are separated from the sources of our goodness and power: from each other, our cultures, and our lands. These connections must be restored. Governmental power is founded on fear, which is used to control and manipulate us in many ways; so, the strategy must be to confront fear and display the courage

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to act against and defeat the state's power.

The first question that arises when this idea is applied in a practical way to the situations facing Onkwehonwe in real life is this: How can we regenerate ourselves culturally and achieve freedom and political independence when the legacies of disconnection, dependency, and dispossession have such a strong hold on us? Undeniably, we face a difficult situation. The political and social institutions that govern us have been shaped and organized to serve white power and they conform to the interests of the states founded on that objective. These state and Settler-serving institutions are useless to the cause of our survival, and if we are to free ourselves from the grip of colonialism, we must reconfigure our politics and replace all of the strategies, institutions, and leaders in place today.

The transformation will begin inside each one of us as personal change, but decolonization will become a reality only when we collectively both commit to a movement based on an *ethical* and *political* vision and consciously reject the colonial postures of weak submission, victimry, and raging violence. It is a political vision and solution that will be capable of altering power relations and

rearranging the forces that shape our lives. Politics is a force that channels social, cultural, and economic powers and makes them imminent in our lives. Abstaining from politics is like turning your back on a beast when it is angry and intent on ripping your guts out.

It is the kind of politics we practise that makes the crucial distinction between the possibility of a regenerative struggle and what we are doing now. Conventional and acceptable approaches to making change are leading us nowhere. Submission and cooperation, which define politics as practised by the current generation of Onkwehonwe politicians, are, I contend, morally, culturally, and politically indefensible and should be dismissed scornfully by any right-thinking person and certainly by any Onkwehonwe who still has dignity.

I pay little attention to the conventional aspects of the politics of pity, such as self-government processes, land claims agreements, and aboriginal rights court cases, because building on what we have achieved up until now in our efforts to decolonize society is insufficient and truly unacceptable as the end-state of a challenge to colonialism. The job is far from finished. Fundamentally different relationships between Onkwehonwe and Settlers will emerge not from negotiations in state-sponsored and government-regulated processes, but only after successful Onkwehonwe resurgences against white society's entrenched privileges and the unreformed structure of the colonial state.

As Onkwehonwe committed to the reclamation of our dignity and strength, there are, theoretically, two viable approaches to engaging the colonial power that is thoroughly embedded in the state and in societal structures: armed resistance and non-violent contention. Each has a heritage among our peoples

and is a potential for making change, for engaging with the adversary without deference to emotional attachments to colonial symbols or to the compromised logic of colonial approaches. They are both philosophically defensible, but are they both equally valid approaches to making change, given the realities of our situations and our goals?

We need a confident position on the question as to what is the right strategy. Both armed resistance and non-violent contention are unique disciplines that require commitments that rule out overlapping allegiances between the two approaches. They are diverging and distinctive ways of making change, and the choice between the two paths is the most important decision the next generation of Onkwehonwe will collectively make.

This is the political formula of the strategy of armed resistance: facing a situation of untenable politics, Onkwehonwe could conceivably move toward practising a punishing kind of aggression, a raging resistance invoking hostile and irredentist negative political visions seeking to engender and escalate the conflict so as to eventually demoralize the Settler society and defeat the colonial state.

Contrast this with the strategic vision of non-violent contention: Onkwehonwe face the untenable politics and unacceptable conditions in their communities and confront the situation with determined

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yet restrained action, coherent and creative contention supplemented with a positive political vision based on re-establishing respect for the original covenants and ancient treaties that reflect the founding principles of the Onkwehonwe-Settler relationship. This would be a movement sure to engender conflict, but it would be conflict for a positive purpose and with the hope of recreating the conditions of coexistence. Rather than enter the arena of armed resistance, we would choose to perform rites of resurgence.

These forms of resurgence have already begun. There are people in all communities who understand that a true decolonization movement can emerge only when we shift our politics from articulating grievances to pursuing an organized and political battle for the cause of our freedom. These new warriors understand the need to refuse any further disconnection from their heritage and the need to reconnect with the spiritual bases of their existences as Onkwehonwe. There is a solid theory of change in this concept of an indigenous peoples' movement. The theory of change is the lived experience of our warriors. Their lives are a dynamic of power generated by creative energy flowing from their heritage through their courageous and unwavering determination to recreate themselves and act together to meet the challenges of their day.

Despite the visible and public victories in court cases and casino profits, neither of these strategies generates the transformative experience that recreates people like spiritual-cultural resurgences can do. The truly revolutionary goal is to transform disconnection and fear into connection and to transcend colonial culture and institutions. Onkwehonwe have been successful on personal and collective levels by rejecting extremism on both ends of the spectrum between the reformist urgings of tame legalists and the unfocused rage of armed insurgents.

The experience of resurgence and regeneration in Onkwehonwe communities thus far proves that change cannot be made from within the colonial structure. Institutions and ideas that are the creation of the colonial relationship are not capable of ensuring our survival; this has been amply proven as well by the

absolute failure of institutional and legalist strategies to protect our lands and our rights, as well as in their failure to motivate younger generations of Onkwehonwe to action.

In the face of the strong renewed push by the state for the legal and political assimilation of our peoples, as well as a rising tide of consumerist materialism making its way into our communities, the last remaining remnants of distinctive Onkwehonwe values and culture are being wiped out. The situation is urgent and calls for even more intensive and profound resurgences on even more levels, certainly not moderation. Many people are paralyzed by fear or idled by complacency and will sit passively and watch destruction consume our people. But I am writing for those of us who prefer a dangerous dignity to safe self-preservation.

People have always faced these challenges. None of what I am saying is new, either to people's experiences in the world or to political philosophy. What is emerging in our communities is a renewed respect for indigenous knowledge and Onkwehonwe ways of thinking. Onkwehonwe are linked in spirit and strategy with other indigenous peoples confronting empire throughout the world. When we look into the heart of our own communities, we can relate to the struggles of peoples in Africa or Asia and appreciate the North African scholar Albert Memmi's thoughts in his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized* on how, in the language of his day, colonized

peoples respond to oppression: "One can be reconciled to every situation, and the colonized can wait a long time to live. But, regardless of how soon or how violently the colonized rejects his situation, he will one day begin to overthrow his unliveable existence with the whole force of his oppressed personality." The question facing us is this one: For us today, here in this land, how will the overthrow of our unliveable existence come about?

The colonizers stand on guard for their ill-gotten privileges using highly advanced techniques, mainly co-optation, division, and, when required, physical repression. The weak people in the power equation help the colonizers too, with their self-doubts, laziness, and unfortunate insistence on their own disorganization!

Challenging all of this means even redefining the terminology of our existence. Take the word, "colonization," which is actually a way of seeing and explaining what has happened to us. We cannot allow that word to be the story of our lives, because it is a narrative that in its use privileges the colonizer's power and inherently limits our freedom, logically and mentally imposing a perpetual colonized victim way of life and view on the world.

Onkwehonwe are faced not with the same adversary their ancestors confronted, but with a colonization that has recently morphed into a kind of post-modern imperialism that is more difficult to target than the previous and more obvious impositions of force and control over the structures of government within their communities. The challenge is to reframe revolt.

To remain true to a struggle conceived within Onkwehonwe values, the end goal of our Wasáse – our warrior's dance – must be formulated as a spiritual revolution, a culturally rooted *social* movement that transforms the whole of society and a *political* action that seeks to remake the entire landscape of power and relationship to truly reflect a liberated post-imperial vision.

Wasáse is spiritual revolution and contention. It is not a path of violence. And yet, this commitment to non-violence is not pacifism either. This is an important point to make clear: I believe there is a



Symbol of the Native Youth Movement

need for morally grounded defiance and non-violent agitation combined with the development of a collective capacity for self-defence, so as to generate within the Settler society a reason and incentive to negotiate constructively in the interest of achieving a respectful coexistence.

Following an awakening among the people and cultural redefinition, after social agitation, after engaging in a politics of contention, after creative confrontation, we will be free to determine our own existences. Wasáse, struggle in all of its forms, truly defines an authentic existence. This is why I speak of warriors. To be Onkwehonwe, to be fully human, is to be living the ethic of courage and to be involved in a struggle for personal transformation and freedom from the dominance of imperial ideas and powers – especially facing the challenges in our lives today. Any other path or posture is surrender or complicity.

Some people believe in the promise of what they call “traditional government” as the ultimate solution to our problems, as if just getting rid of the imposed corrupt band or tribal governments and resurrecting old laws and structures would solve everything. I used to believe that myself. But there is a problem with this way of thinking, too. The traditional governments and laws we hold out as the pure good alternatives to the imposed colonial systems were developed at a time when people were different than we are now; they were people who were confidently rooted in their culture, bodily and spiritually strong, and capable of surviving independently in their natural environments. Regretfully, the levels of participation in social and political life, the physical fitness, and the cultural skills these models require are far beyond our weakened and dispirited people right now.

And though I am speaking non-violently of a creative reinterpretation of what it is to be a warrior, I am doing so in full reverence and honour of the essence of the ancient warrior spirit, because a warrior makes a stand facing danger with courage and integrity. The warrior spirit is the strong medicine we need to cure the European disease. But, drawing on the old spirit, we need to create something new for ourselves and think through the reality of the present to

Some people may find it shocking or absurd for me to suggest that an Onkwehonwe community is a kind of war zone. But anyone who has actually lived on a reserve will agree with this tragic analogy on some level ... There is no post-colonial situation; the invaders our ancestors fought against are still here ...

design an appropriate strategy, use fresh tactics, and acquire new skills.

If non-indigenous readers are capable of listening, they will learn from these words, and they will discover that while we are envisioning a new relationship between Onkwehonwe and the land, we are at the same time offering a decolonized alternative to the Settler by inviting them to share our vision of respect and peaceful coexistence.

The time to change direction is now. Signs of defeat have been showing on the faces of our people for too long. Young people, those who have not yet learned to accommodate to the fact that they are expected to accept their lesser status quietly, are especially hard hit by defeatism and alienation. Youth in our communities and in urban centres are suffering. Suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, cultural confusion, sexual violence, obesity: they suffer these scourges worse than anyone else.

It is not because they lack money or jobs in the mainstream society (we shouldn't forget that our people have always been “poor” as consumers in comparison to white people). It is because their identities, their cultures, and their rights are under attack by a racist government. The wounds suffered by young Onkwehonwe people in battle are given little succour by their own leaders, and they find only scorn or condescension in the larger world. These young people are fighting raging battles for their own survival every day, and when they become convinced that to fight is futile and the battle likely to be lost, they retreat. Yet they have pride, and rather than submit to the enemy, they sacrifice themselves, sometimes using mercifully quick and sometimes painfully

slow methods.

Some people may find it shocking or absurd for me to suggest that an Onkwehonwe community is a kind of war zone. But anyone who has actually lived on a reserve will agree with this tragic analogy on some level. Make no mistake about it, Brothers and Sisters: the war is on. There is no post-colonial situation; the invaders our ancestors fought against are still here, for they have not yet rooted themselves and been transformed into real people of this homeland. Onkwehonwe must find a way to triumph over notions of history that relegate our existence to the past by preserving ourselves in this hostile and disintegrating environment. To do so, we must regenerate ourselves through action because living the white man's vision of an Indian or an aboriginal will just not do it for us.

We are each facing modernity's attempt to conquer our souls. The conquest is happening as weak, cowardly, stupid, petty, and greedy ways worm themselves into our lives and take the place of the beauty, sharing, and harmony that defined life in our communities for previous generations. Territorial losses and political disempowerment are secondary conquests compared to that first, spiritual cause of discontent. The challenge is to find a way to regenerate ourselves and take back our dignity. Then, meaningful change will be possible, and it will be a new existence, one of possibility, where Onkwehonwe will have the ability to make the kinds of choices we need to make concerning the quality of our lives and begin to recover a truly human way of life.★

REVERSING THE TIDE OF PRIVATIZATION

Local and global struggles for the de-commodification of water

BY SUSAN SPRONK

In March 2006 global water barons will assemble in Monterrey, Mexico for their fourth international meeting to deliberate on how to make a profit from the world's water. Sponsored by the World Water Council, an interest group formed by some of the world's largest corporations, the World Water Forum (WWF) exposes the intimate links between neoliberal globalization, transnational corporations and privatization. Predictably, the Forum has also become a stage for a growing civil society resistance movement. Anti-privatization activists in Mexico and around the world are counter-organizing, hoping to interrupt the corporate agenda, if only for a brief moment, claiming to fight the growing "commodification" of water.

These struggles against the "commodification" of water provide the basis for a potentially radical agenda. Much depends, however, on what is meant by the term and what kinds of links are made between commodification and other oppressive social processes.

THE ROOT OF WATER PRIVATIZATION: COMMODIFICATION

The recent drive to privatize water began in the early 1990s, when the World Bank decided to endorse the privatization of everything as the new dogma of public policy. Their decision was heavily influenced by transnational water companies. After the "success" of water privatization in England and Wales under Margaret Thatcher, these companies saw a brilliant opportunity to profit from what they saw as the ultimate



In choosing its roadside billboards, the French transnational water corporation seems oblivious to the fact that over 60 percent of the Bolivian population is indigenous.

PHOTO: SUSAN SPRONK

commodity: water. In England and Wales, the private corporations made off with "windfall profits", while consumers faced higher prices. The transnational water corporations were chomping at the bit to enter what one bank president called "the last infrastructure frontier for private investors." Playing its role as global manager of capitalism, the World Bank started to force heavily indebted Third World countries to privatize public services in exchange for new loans.

The World Bank hoped that water privatization would work as well elsewhere as it had in Europe, insisting that governments everywhere introduce "full cost recovery" policies in the delivery of public services. Neoliberals argued that it was necessary to charge customers the "right" price for water. As the story goes, if people do not pay the true cost of water, they will waste it. Indeed, the poor must be disciplined by market imperatives to conserve what is portrayed as a

precious resource. The World Bank has gone so far as to say that privatization is the quick-fix solution to prevent an impending ecological crisis. This argument found its most eloquent expression in the ominous words of a former World Bank Vice-President, who warned that the next century's wars will not be about oil, but water.

This neoliberal discourse of water scarcity must be exposed as a myth. Notions of "scarcity" are used to justify privatization lest the poor die of thirst, while the rich fill their swimming pools. In most cases, it is not because there is not enough water that the poor do not have access to it. Rather, scarcity is socially produced by capitalist development. The precursor for privatization is commodification, the process by which all natural resources are fenced off, or "enclosed", and assigned private property rights, so that workers are separated from the means of subsistence. This way, the

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compulsion of economic forces ensures that workers leave their houses everyday to sell the only commodity they have left – labour-power – so that they can pay for things they need to live, like water.

The water privatization project has not turned out as well as the World Bank hoped. After an initial boom in private investment in the water sector in the early 1990s, there was a steep decline. Some corporations started to lose interest after some bad experiences. Suez, for one, was burned by currency devaluations in Manila in 1997 and Argentina in 2001. Others have been thrown out by protests as in Tucumán and Santa Fe, Argentina, and Cochabamba, Bolivia. People across the globe are saying “NO!” to the privatization of water.

Organizations as diverse as the Anti-Privatization Forum in South Africa, which has a socialist orientation, and the Council of Canadians, which is thoroughly social democratic, have joined forces calling for the “de-commodification” of water. These organizations do not necessarily mean the same thing by “de-commodification.” As David McDonald and Greg Ruiters argue in their book, *Age of Commodity* (2005), many of the activists that use this term do not refer to its more radical meaning – the transformation of capitalist relations – but simply that water should be provided for free. As they further note, however, “to call for the ‘decommodification’ of water ... is to call for nothing less than the rupturing of the social relations that contributed to its commodification in the first place”. The call for the de-commodification of water can therefore be the beginning of a potentially more radical agenda.

Three recent examples of struggles over water privatization – in Bolivia, South Africa, and the United States – suggest that the struggle against the “commodification” of water is potentially part of an anti-capitalist politics, and clearly connected to struggles against imperialism and racism.

EL ALTO, BOLIVIA

The private contract held by Suez in La Paz-El Alto was formerly billed as a flagship of “pro-poor” water privatization. The company was financed by generous loans from development banks. The

World Bank even owned a portion of its shares through its private sector lending arm, the International Financial Corporation. Despite its net profits of US\$12 million over seven years, the company ironically complained that the residents of El Alto did not consume enough water so it couldn’t make all the new connections that it promised. There were rumors that the company wanted to leave. The government caved in, allowed the company to raise the fees, and said it did not have to bring water to the poor. These decisions left about 200,000 people, a fifth of the slum’s population, without access to clean water.

By the beginning of 2005, the people of El Alto, a predominantly indigenous city perched on the border of La Paz, had decided that they had had enough. Inspired by the struggle in Cochabamba, where a broad-based coalition threw out American construction giant Bechtel five years before, and building on the momentum from the valiant struggle to nationalize precious natural resources that peaked in the “Gas War” of 2003, thousands of people took to the streets in January demanding, “The water is ours, dammit!” The government promised to cancel the contract so that the protestors would go home. But, it has since changed its tune hoping that if it plays nice it can purchase the company’s shares. So far, Suez is clearly winning the game thanks to the help of its friends, including the development banks, which have made their position in the conflict clear. They do not want to see their privatization project sink in the mud and have threatened to withhold international aid if the utility returns to public control. The World Bank even told former Bolivian President Carlos Mesa in March that if he canceled the contract with Suez, it wanted its shares paid back immediately.

The thirst for justice runs deep in El Alto. Locals see their struggle for democratic control over water resources as linked to the broader struggle to re-assert national sovereignty. A succession of imperialist powers have benefited from Bolivia’s plentiful natural resources. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish forced indian slaves down the mines of Potosí to strip the silver. This century, the Americans and Brazilians have piped the natural gas from the eastern provinces to

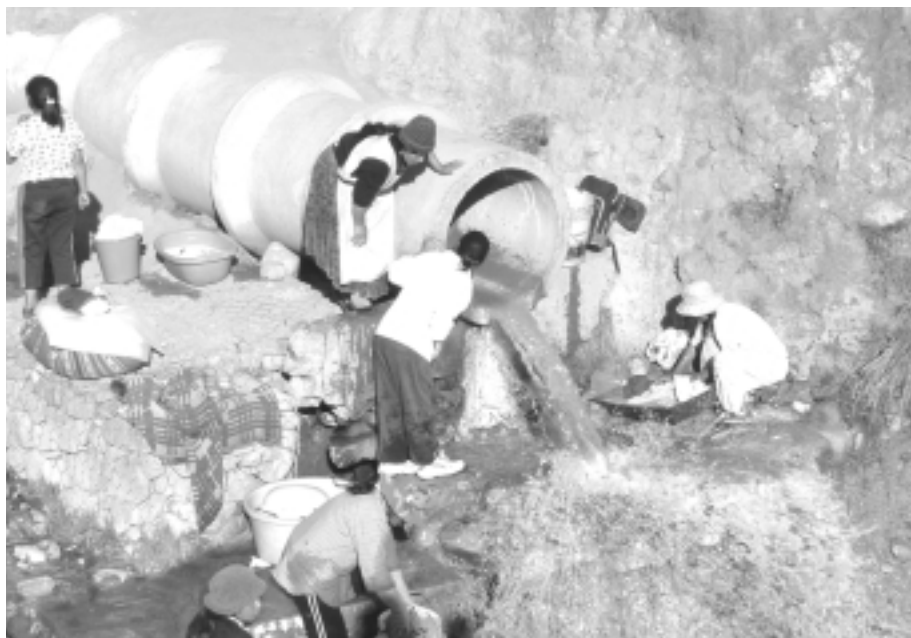
feed their industrial machines and have left Bolivians without gas for their homes. After centuries of looting by foreigners and complicit local elites, Bolivians are thus organizing to reclaim control over their natural resources. In repeated protests organized by the local association of neighborhood councils (FEJUVE-El Alto), the predominantly indigenous residents of El Alto have made it clear that no one should be able to profit from their water. Suez, the same company that built Britain’s canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea in the 1860s, is no longer welcome in Bolivia.

SOUTH AFRICA

Case studies from South Africa demonstrate how struggles for the de-commodification of water are also intertwined with the liberation struggle. Similar to Bolivia, there is no denying that there is a direct correlation between colour of skin and economic position in South Africa. What is lesser known, however, is that since the end of formal apartheid, this racial-class divide has actually deepened as South Africa goes through its difficult transition from apartheid to fully-fledged neoliberal capitalism. The liberation struggle has thus taken on new class dimensions.

When the African National Congress was first elected to government, it made the right to water a constitutional right. At the same time, however, it implemented neoliberal policies, including the privatization of public services and full cost recovery. This move has further entrenched the inequalities inherited from apartheid. Many of the formerly predominantly white municipalities doubled in size as the black townships were incorporated into their districts,

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Women are the most affected by the privatization of water. These women in El Alto are washing in water rejected by a water purification plant.

many of which had bad or no water services. Facing budgetary crises, many municipal governments turned to the private sector. As noted by activist Richard Makolos of South Africa's Crisis Water Committee, the ANC's neoliberal policies have entrenched a new form of inequality: "Apartheid separated whites and Blacks. Privatization separates the rich from the poor."

After the worst cholera outbreak in South Africa's history, facing water cut-offs and skyrocketing service fees, people are frustrated with the ANC's embrace of neoliberalism. In *We are the Poores* (2002), scholar-activist Ashwin Desai describes how a local movement for public services has linked up with community and labour struggles in other parts of the country, which came together in massive anti-government protests during the UN World Conference Against Racism in 2001.

Bolstered by their experience in collective struggle, many residents have taken matters into their own hands, making "self-reconnection" part of a broader political movement to reclaim the commons. As Desai describes, "In Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg, the reconnection of water and electricity by community movements has reached 'epidemic' proportions, reappropriating basic needs and creating no-go zones of decommodification."

DETROIT, MICHIGAN, USA

Multi-dimensional struggles for water have also sprouted in the heart of the Empire. Detroit, like many cities in America, has crumbling infrastructure and enormous debts. In 2004, the municipal council decided to hire Thames Water to balance the utility's budget by punishing the poor. In 2004, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department shut off water service to 40,000 households in the middle of the winter. Unable to meet their basic water needs, the elderly and poor were also denied steam heat.

In this struggle, anti-poverty activists made links with local ecological organizations in their fight against the local water utility. Situated in the Great Lakes Basin, local residents had also been involved in a fight against global corporation, Nestlé, who owned a facility that was pumping enormous volumes of water out of the local aquifer for a bottling plant. To organize large-scale protests to take on the city, the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization joined forces with the Sweetwater Alliance, a coalition that aims to keep essential resources out of corporate control. These organizations were able to expose the perverse relationship between poverty and plenty. While Nestlé was shipping away Michigan's water for enormous profits, poor community residents, primarily black women, were denied their basic human

right to water. Thanks to the protests, thousands were reconnected.

A SOCIALIST AGENDA?

The privatization of water has met with fierce resistance at the local level. Indeed, the privatization of water has been more consistently controversial than the privatization of other natural resources, such as oil and gas, mainly because the issue strikes an emotional cord. Water has cultural and symbolic meaning because it is the essence of life. Also, it does not require complicated technology to bring it to users. Since water falls from the sky, we are much more inclined to argue that it is "ours."

Few of today's movements that call for de-commodification of water services, however, connect their struggle to a more radical project. While it is common to hear that it is "immoral" to make profits from water, it is difficult to imagine hearing the same passionate rhetoric about food. Promisingly, activists from the "Water for All Campaign" of Public Citizen have made a positive move in this direction. Recently, they formed a new autonomous organization called "Food and Water Watch", which aims to fight the increasing corporate control not only over water but the production of food. Connections can and are being made.

In places like Bolivia, where ideas of socialism have dominated the imagination of the Left, the term de-commodification retains its more radical meaning. As Oscar Olivera, former trade union leader and anti-privatization activist, states in his book on the Cochabamba Water War, "The true opposite of privatization is the social re-appropriation of wealth by working-class society itself – self-organized in communal structures of management, in neighborhood associations, and in the rank and file".

The global activists who will interrupt the water baron's party in Mexico this spring may only be using the term "decommodification" to mean "water for all". Nonetheless there are signs that the struggles against the privatization of the world's water supplies can provide a common ground upon which to build an even more progressive and ambitious agenda.★

Will Evo Morales change Bolivia?

BY JEFFERY R. WEBBER

The results of the December 18 elections in Bolivia were surprising to everyone, including to Evo Morales himself, the leader of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party. Morales won 54% of the vote, almost double the 29% for the nearest contender, right-wing Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga. A record 85% of eligible voters cast ballots, despite reports of widespread disqualification of mostly indigenous peasant supporters of Morales for technicalities. Since the return of electoral democracy to Bolivia in 1982, no presidential candidate has come close to achieving an absolute majority (over 50%). This makes Morales’ victory all the more remarkable.

The majority of Bolivians identify as indigenous people, and it is also notable that Morales is the first indigenous president in South American history. MAS won a majority in the lower house, a near majority in the Senate, and three of nine governorships. There are, therefore, no institutional obstacles to blame if MAS fails to carry through the hopes of the exploited and oppressed popular classes and indigenous nations who voted it into office.

The electoral results in Bolivia were greeted with widespread euphoria across both the NGO (non-governmental organization) Left and large sections of the radical Left internationally. Important socialist intellectuals in other parts of Latin America, such as Atilio Borón in Argentina and Heinz Dieterich in Mexico, see anti-capitalist, revolutionary potential in Morales’s victory. People

Morales’ party, Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) has moved away from mass struggle and towards electoral politics.

with a more sceptical view of the new Bolivian government, such as the long-time socialist researcher on Latin America James Petras or journalists Luís A. Gómez and Jean Friedsky of Narconews, are frequently dismissed as ultra-leftists, sectarians, dogmatists, etc.

Although it is too early to pronounce confidently on the character of the new Bolivian government, the recent history of the MAS and its relationship to the wave of popular insurrection that began in 2000 and peaked in October 2003 and May-June 2005 supports the view of the sceptics. The optimistic view is based on a superficial understanding of the Bolivian situation.

THE MAS AND POPULAR-INDIGENOUS STRUGGLE

Bolivia entered a revolutionary cycle of near-constant popular insurrection in 2000, starting with the “Water War” of 2000 in the city of Cochabamba and its surrounding countryside. That popular revolt against the privatization of water also signified popular condemnation of

the entire period of neoliberalism (1985-2000), with its rampant privatization, growing inequity and ongoing poverty.

The Water War was followed by three weeks of mobilization and road blockades by the Aymara peasantry in the altiplano (high plateau region) in September-October 2000. The heights of the revolutionary cycle, however, came during the October 2003 Gas War that forced neoliberal president Gonzalo (Goni) Sánchez de Lozada to flee the country, and in May-June 2005 when Goni’s successor Carlos Mesa was forced to resign due to his refusal to break with the neoliberal economic model.

What do we know of the MAS during this period? The MAS grew out of the coca-growing, indigenous peasant resistance in the Chapare region of the country. During the late 1980s and 1990s the cocaleros (coca growers) were the most important force on the indigenous-Left. They combined the revolutionary Marxist traditions of ex-miners forced to move to the Chapare region due to the privatization of the tin mines with traditions of indigenous peasant resistance. Facing brutal repression under the US-led “War on Drugs,” the cocaleros developed an anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal ideology directed primarily against the US.

For the first few years of its life, in the late 1990s, the MAS maintained organic ties with the cocaleros’ peasant unions. Evo Morales, of mixed Aymara-Quechua descent, was among the most important union leaders and would emerge as the front person of the MAS. The MAS initially focused on extra-parliamentary activism and base-level democracy, but especially since the 2002 elections has moved away from mass struggle and towards electoral politics.

In the 2002 elections, Evo Morales came second to Sánchez de Lozada in the presidential race by less than 2%. This unexpectedly good result, following on the heels of inflammatory pre-election threats against Bolivians by the US ambassador, gave the party a sense that they could win electorally. The MAS began to shift away from street mobilizations and towards courting the “middle class.”

The leading sectors of the popular-

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indigenous mobilizations of September-October 2003 radicalized and brought into the streets hundreds of thousands of people despite MAS attempts to contain and soften their demands. The party's vision was to win the scheduled 2007 elections and they would not let a revolution get in their way! Evo Morales supported the constitutional exit from the crisis in 2003, allowing Goni's vice-president Carlos Mesa to come to power. Morales and the MAS were instrumental in supporting Mesa's neoliberal government well into 2005.

During May-June 2005 the MAS did participate in a way they hadn't in October 2003, leading a march from Caracollo to La Paz to demand a Constituent Assembly. Nonetheless, the party emphasized the need for a constitutional exit to the revolutionary situation and the supremacy of electoral politics.

At a massive rally in the central plaza of La Paz during the height of the May-June insurrection, I listened to a whole series of leaders of popular organizations calling for the nationalization of natural gas. Meanwhile, huge sections of the crowd chanted "Nationalization! Nationalization!" Morales was the only speaker to call instead for 50% taxes for transnational gas corporations exploiting natural gas resources in Bolivia.

In the early stages of the electoral campaign, before Álvaro García Linera became the party's vice-presidential candidate, the MAS attempted to form a broad alliance with the Movement without Fear municipal party, led by neoliberal La Paz mayor Juan del Granado.

James Petras is absolutely correct when he writes of October and May-June: "Morales succeeded in taking the peoples' struggle out of the street and dismantling the nascent popular councils and channelling them into established bourgeois institutions. In both crises, Evo favored a neo-liberal replacement in opposition to the peoples' demands for a new popularly controlled national assembly."

THE FIRST INDIGENOUS PRESIDENT

Much has been made of the fact that Evo Morales is the first indigenous president in South American history. To understand the significance of this, let's look at the very different but nonetheless

Morales is the first indigenous president in South American history

instructive national liberation struggles of southern Africa.

In his book *The Next Liberation Struggle* (2005), John Saul points out that the first series of national liberation struggles in southern Africa, from 1960 to 1990, were fought against European colonial occupation and white minority rule, and for Black majority rule. Winning Black majority rule is to be celebrated, but Saul's book correctly calls for a new struggle in southern Africa, or "the next liberation struggle": a revolutionary transition to socialism, because Black majority rule has not meant an end to capitalist exploitation in southern Africa.

Similarly, in Bolivia gains by indigenous peoples in Congress in 2002 and Morales' victory in December 2005 are important steps towards bringing an end to white-mestizo (mixed race) minority control of the state in a country where the majority of the population is indige-

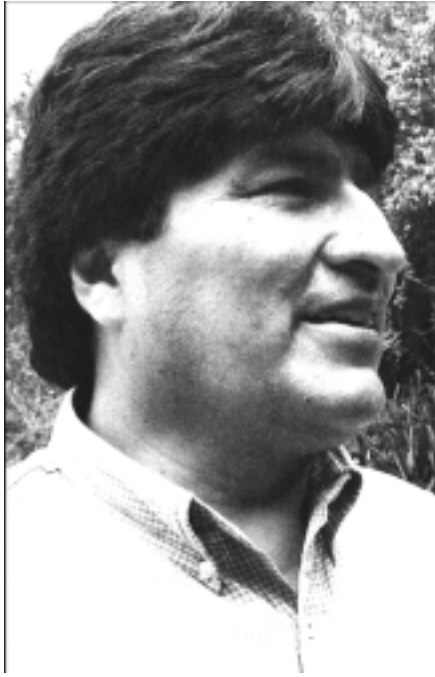
nous people. This is a democratic gain. At the same time, however, the MAS has taken steps against the "next liberation struggle" for socialist transformation, just as the African National Congress did in South Africa after the defeat of apartheid.

Across Latin America, one of the central paradoxes of the 1990s has been the emergence of neoliberal multiculturalism. In reaction to massive indigenous mobilizations, states began to react to contain the radical potential of these movements through official "recognition" of cultural diversity, indigenous languages, and so on. At the same time, while the cultures of indigenous peoples are being "recognized" by neoliberal states, the living conditions of indigenous peoples are deteriorating!

In a recent interview with an Uruguayan radio station Petras pointed out that for a president to say "I'm indigenous, or I come from humble origins" does not guarantee anything. We need only look at the deplorable examples of Víctor Hugo Cárdenas who served as Bolivia's vice-president from 1993-1997, President Toledo in Peru (who claims indigenous descent and wore a poncho in his first presidential electoral race) or Gutiérrez in Ecuador. All three were indigenous – or indigenous-backed – leaders who did not break with neoliberal



Miners line the stage of a MAS election rally.



New Bolivian president, Evo Morales

eralism and did not forge the path toward the next liberation struggle.

THE NEW ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Since their victory, the MAS leadership has been playing to their different bases of support. Morales quickly made visits to Cuba and Venezuela, suggesting a united fight against “neoliberalism and imperialism.” At the same time, however, Morales and García Linera were quick to visit the most reactionary sections of the Bolivian capitalist class in Santa Cruz, in particular the far right Civic Committee of Santa Cruz. This meeting was to reassure these capitalists that their interests would be protected under the new administration.

Early visits were also made to Brazil and Spain. Not coincidentally, the Brazilian state-owned multinational Petrobras and the Spanish oil and gas giant Repsol are the biggest investors in Bolivia’s natural gas industry. As the Spanish newspaper *El País* reported recently, “Bolivian President-elect Evo Morales softened his tone... over plans to nationalize his country’s gas industry as he met with Spanish officials and business leaders in Madrid.”

The newspaper reports that according to Spanish Industry Minister José Montilla, Morales has adopted a “prudent” line with regard to the nationalization of natural gas resources. The

minister stated bluntly: “There will be certain changes to the rules of the game... but I told him that companies need a stable and trustworthy environment in which to invest and I think he is conscious of that.” This corresponds with the fact that while occasionally using the word “nationalization,” the MAS leadership has been nothing but ambiguous as to what they mean by nationalization.

Vice-president García Linera has famously denounced a transition to socialism in Bolivia as impossible for at least 50 to 100 years. Instead, he argues for “Andean-Amazonian capitalism,” which through greater state intervention will supposedly be supportive of indigenous peoples. We should remember that the ANC’s black capitalism has been anything but good for South Africa’s black working class.

If the MAS radicalizes during its first months in office, it will not be a consequence of the benevolent leadership of Morales or García Linera. It will come from pressure from below, from the same sort of mass self-organization that we witnessed in Cochabamba in 2000, and throughout the country in October 2003 and May-June 2005. The chances of success for mass struggle will probably be better in the first year of the MAS administration, before the Right has time to regroup and rebuild counterrevolutionary forces.

There are some signs of optimism in the social movements. Two popular meetings were held in El Alto in early December, just before the elections. The first was the Congress of the National Front for the Defence of Water and Basic Services and Life. Neighbourhood councils from Oruro and Santa Cruz, FEJUVE-El Alto, and the La Coordinadora (the principal social movement organization in the Cochabamba Water War of 2000) held a rather successful meeting calling for a social-political front outside of the MAS to foster the self-organization of the masses on the Cochabamba model regardless of what party is in government. This movement may prove to have some capacity to

mobilize against the MAS government if it does not meet popular expectations.

Oscar Olivera of La Coordinadora recently told *Green Left Weekly*, “we are also conscious of the fact that it does not depend on the capacity of manoeuvring, nor does it depend on the political capacity of the government, whoever it might be, to take us to our objective. It depends fundamentally on continuing to develop and better the capacity of unity, of organisation, of proposals and of mobilisations of the social movements in front of the next government. I believe that is fundamental, and I reiterate that the elections are simply a space for the accumulation of forces.”

The second meeting was organized by the Bolivian Workers Central (COB), the Regional Workers Central of El Alto (COR-El Alto), and the central miners’ union (FSTMB). While this meeting produced much fiery rhetoric, attendance was low.

The organizations that took part in these meetings seem to be remaining independent from the MAS government. Most recently, Olivera was apparently offered a place in government by García Linera. He has shown no interest. It is also unlikely that the mostly Aymara peasantry of the altiplano – a key force in October 2003 and May-June 2005 – will succumb to cooptation through petty handouts from the MAS. They are likely to play a key role in mobilizations that take on the MAS if the party does not fulfill basic expectations.

At the same time, the warnings of Luís Gómez and Jean Friedsky, writing just prior to the elections, need to be taken seriously: “The possibility of an Evo presidency makes many nervous, including us. Our fear is not that Evo’s broad bases will revolt should he not satisfy expectations, but that they won’t. In recent years, Evo’s primary constituency (the cocaleros) and the more radical sectors (the Aymara of El Alto and the surrounding highland provinces) have risen up simultaneously when their interests overlap. But what happens if one group’s allegiance to an elected official overrides their desire to protest?”

We can only hope that mobilization from below continues, beginning the next liberation struggle.★

FRANCE Shock waves



of a popular revolt

Explosions of protests have erupted throughout France's poor suburban neighbourhoods over the past two months.

BY
MURRAY
SMITH

It is nearly two months now since France's poor suburban neighbourhoods exploded. For three weeks they were shaken by nightly riots, in fact a revolt by youth, overwhelmingly of Arab and African origin. The primary tactic was to burn cars, thousands of which went up in smoke. They also attacked anything that symbolised authority or wealth – schools, supermarkets, car showrooms, warehouses and of course police stations.

Now that the dust has settled, we can begin to see the effects of this revolt. At the time the media referred to “the riots”. The hard-line right-wing Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, referred to the young men concerned as “scum” and “rabble” and talked of “cleaning out” the estates where they live. He also said that 75 per cent of those concerned had been in trouble with the police and that the riots had “nothing spontaneous” about them but were “perfectly organised” by “gangs of yobbos” or “fundamentalists.” This sort of talk by Sarkozy and his imitators was widely echoed in the media.

But already quite a different reality has

emerged. Around 3000 young people were arrested during those three weeks, half of them under 18. Several hundred have now been given prison sentences, but the statistics that emerged from the court proceedings showed that 75-80 per cent of them had no previous criminal record.

As for what happened being a revolt – it's official. There exists in France a rather peculiar institution called “General Information” (RG). The role of the RG is to keep the government informed as to what is happening in the country, specifically anything likely to pose a threat to law and bourgeois order. Its agents spend a fair amount of their time snooping around left-wing and trade union movements to gather information. But their role is to do precisely that – gather reliable information, not engage in populist rhetoric.

In a report dated November 23rd, they had this to say: “France has experienced a form of unorganised insurrection, with the emergence (...) of a popular revolt (...) without leaders and without proposing a programme.” Just in case that wasn't clear enough, they added: “no manipula-

tion can be discerned which would accredit the thesis of a generalised and organised uprising” – each group of youth in each neighbourhood acted autonomously. Specifically, Islamic fundamentalists played “no role in the unleashing of violence or in its spreading.” The RG added that in fact Muslims had “every interest in a rapid return to calm to avoid amalgams.” And in fact the only intervention that came from mosques and Muslim associations during the events was to appeal for calm.

The RG also noted that the far Left “didn't see anything coming and is fuming at not having been at the origin of such a movement.” The far Left is hardly “fuming.” But it had nothing to do with what happened for the simple reason that, like most of the rest of the French Left, it is largely absent from those poor housing estates – described by the RG as “urban ghettos of an ethnic character” – which were the centre of the revolt.

The report concluded that the strong identity felt by the young people who revolted “was not only based on their ethnic or geographical origins, but on their social condition as those excluded from French society.” They “feel penalised by their poverty, the colour of

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their skin and their names” and that they have an “absence of prospects” particularly in relation to work.

It is important to understand the two interlinked aspects of this revolt. It is on the one hand a social revolt, an outburst of anger and frustration against their present life in the grim and impoverished housing estates around France’s towns and cities, and against their future prospects, or the lack of them. But these young people are not just suffering the social consequences of neoliberalism. They are suffering these consequences in a way that is magnified by the racism they suffer, a racism that is endemic in French society. This racism is expressed on a social level – by discrimination in housing and employment, and in access to leisure activity. It is of course illegal but it happens anyway. It is expressed by daily contact with the police who constantly harass them.

The revolt was an expression of all that. No doubt as a form of struggle, burning cars and schools leaves a lot to be desired. But these young people have propelled the issue of their situation into the forefront of French society. Now the discriminations they suffer from are admitted by politicians and the media. And beyond that their revolt has acted as a catalyst for something that was already under way before – the raising of the “race question” in France.

This is something very difficult for French society to deal with, even on the Left. In France, you see, everyone is supposed to be equal – the idea of equality is deeply rooted in society. This has a positive side in the radical egalitarian consciousness that helps to explain the regular outbursts of revolt that have punctuated recent history. But it can also have a negative side by refusing to see really existing inequality. In particular, the idea of any separate identity is quite contrary to the ideology of the Republic. The French bourgeois republic was built in a centralised, monolithic way, including the suppression of minority nationalities and languages. Everyone is French, full stop.

One rather ironic result of this mentality is that whereas the press is full of the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and now these violent young people in the suburbs, no one actually knows exactly

The Left is very much absent from the areas where the revolt broke out, which are often described as a “political desert”. This is misleading. There are in fact many associations active in these quarters, sometimes of a religious character, sometimes not.

how many Muslims there are in France, or how many Black people, or how many second- and third generation immigrants. This is because the government refuses to collect statistics based on religion or national origin. But it is perfectly clear that although all French people are equal, some are more equal than others. And it’s a question not just of class, but also of race. France’s immigrant populations are still paying the price of the racism that was born with the slave trade and colonialism.

Coming to terms with this did not start with the revolt of this autumn, but it has sped things up. A Representative Council of Black Organisations (CRAN) has been set up, to encourage “the emergence of a black consciousness.” On the bicentenary of Napoleon’s victory at Austerlitz, a collective of citizens of France’s overseas departments denounced the fact that the Emperor had restored slavery, which had been abolished by the Revolution. At the moment a broad alliance is campaigning for the repeal of a law voted by Parliament last February, which stipulates that the “positive role” of French colonialism should be taught in

schools. In various ways, including inside the Socialist Party, the question of the non-representation of France’s non-white citizens in its political institutions is being posed. Sarkozy had to cancel a planned visit to France’s departments in the Caribbean in the face of widespread protests.

All this raises many debates. The self-organisation of the oppressed is not part of French political culture, not even, and perhaps especially not, on the Left. The idea of any specific consciousness, other than a common social and political consciousness, is seen as divisive, even by some of the victims of racism. An article in *Le Monde* spoke of them being torn “between a desire for integration and a demand for recognition of their specificity”. It did not seem to occur to the journalist that the recognition of a specific identity, a specific history or a specific oppression might be the precondition for real integration.

The Left is very much absent from the areas where the revolt broke out, which are often described as a “political desert.” This is misleading. There are in fact many associations active in these quarters, sometimes of a religious character, sometimes not. But there is little contact with the French Left, and some mutual suspicion. This has to be overcome. A polarisation is taking place in French society. On the one hand racist and reactionary ideas have real support, as is seen by the renewed activity of the far Right since the revolt and widespread support for Sarkozy’s positions. This has to be countered and it cannot be countered without building an alliance between the still largely white Left and those who are on the receiving end of racism. There are some positive signs. There have been demonstrations against the state of emergency, supported by the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), sections of the Communist party and many associations. The campaign against the law on “positive colonialism” is supported by a front that, almost uniquely, goes from the right wing of the Socialist Party, via the Communist Party and the Greens, to Workers’ Struggle (LO) and the LCR. But much more needs to be done and the radical Left has a particular responsibility to close the gap between itself and the non-white population in France. ★

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A COUNTRY ...

A retrospective look at western intervention in Yugoslavia

BY RADE ZINAIC

This is the first part of a two-part article on the break-up of the former Yugoslavia.

In his masterful yet controversial 1995 film *Underground*, the prize-winning Bosnian director Emir Kusturica chronicles the birth, development and death of post-World War II Yugoslavia. Focusing on a white-collar intellectual and a working class gangster, Kusturica's deceptively simple story identifies what he believes to be the primary social forces responsible for the creation, corruption, and eventual degeneration of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Marko, a member of the Serbian pre-war intellectual elite, joins the Communist Party at the dawn of the Nazi bombing of Belgrade, taking with him his life-long friend, an electrician and revolutionary named Blacky. Kusturica's film portrays with great poignancy and depth how historical forces shape and complicate interpersonal relationships. Marko eventually turns into a party bureaucrat, content to enjoy the fruits of power and privilege while duping Blacky into fighting a never-ending revolutionary war. Blacky, oblivious to the intrigues of wartime politics, is wounded and forced to live in a surreal underground cellar with other proletarians and peasants. For forty-six years, his wartime politics fester. When he emerges from underground in 1992 in the midst of the Bosnian civil war, he

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relives his hatred for Nazis, fascist Croats and other collaborators — but now that hatred is directed to Croats and Muslims. The world changes but his sense, real or perceived, of being under siege remains.

Many denounced *Underground* as pro-Milosevic propaganda because it failed to challenge Serbian ethnic chauvinism by not blaming the Serbs for the destruction of Yugoslavia. Popular intellectual Slavoj Žižek interpreted the film, with its rhythmic dance of sexism, song and sacrifice, as an expression of the fantasies held by ethnic cleansers who tormented Bosnia from 1992-1995. Others viewed it as a courageous attempt to represent the demonized Serbs as people capable of humour, love and humanity. What critics on both sides failed to see, however, was the film's untruthful depiction of the fall of Yugoslavia as the result of a primarily internal conflict, a tragic and bloody struggle that was somehow predestined to happen. The "underground" served as a metaphor for a collective irrational violence and betrayal that exploded into history as though from nowhere.

Like any superficial reading of this tragic war, the mainstream view that this was a conflict between organic evil and naive good conceals as much as it reveals.

THE WESTERN MAINSTREAM VIEW

Interestingly, this interpretation was also the dominant view in Western accounts of the conflict. In the early nineties, there were many high-falutin journalistic surveys of Balkan history with each author claiming to reveal the true causes of the ethnic strife. The most glaring and unfortunate example was Robert D. Kaplan's immensely popular *Balkan Ghosts* (1993). This tome, a Clinton administration favourite, described Balkan peoples as natural haters who were culturally stunted by half a millennia of Eastern decadence and empire, and who thus were in dire need of Western enlightenment and moral rehabilitation. This poisonously racist and paternalistic sentiment, one which managed to seep its way into conventional opinion, caricatures the Balkan region as a land inhabited by childish and sadistic people who are easily manipulated by charismatic personalities. From this perspective, the conflict occurred when the surrogate Western parents were unable to effectively deal with murderous Balkan tantrums.

The mainstream media's take on the fragmentation of Yugoslavia portrayed Slobodan Milosevic as a Balkan sorcerer — an opportunistic politician who managed to stir up an aggressive nationalism among the Serbs of Kosovo in June of 1989. The Albanian majority of this autonomous province within Serbia became a scapegoat for all Serb historical grievances. Milosevic's populist act ushered in a period of federal turbulence as each republic in the FRY vied for political and financial independence. Croatia and Serbia, the two largest republics, under the leadership of Franjo Tudjman

and Milosevic respectively, became embroiled in a bitter contest to partition multi-ethnic Bosnia. The Western response to this Balkan power play was confused and piecemeal, a patch-work of pathetic ceasefires and hollow condemnations of violence. Indeed, the popular media portrayed Western forces as uninterested, bumbling and ill-focused until public opinion helped end the ethnic slaughter by forcing a NATO-led so-called humanitarian intervention in 1995. The 1995 Dayton Peace Accord, signed by all three belligerents (Serbia, Croatia and Albania), ushered in a Western-sanctioned period of relative stability.

The problem with this account is twofold. First, it over-emphasizes the role of individual actors in the break-up of Yugoslavia — nations are caricatured as individuals. And, second, the West is presented as only externally related to the conflict, the Keystone cops arriving belatedly on the scene. Like any superficial reading of this tragic war, the mainstream view that this was a conflict between organic evil and naive good conceals as much as it reveals. Glossed over are the processes that set the conditions for the emergence of virulent ethnic nationalisms. The purpose of this two-part article is to explain that war, massacre and social suffering are not natural to groups and/or regions, but fall out from the interplay of various economic and political forces. Indeed, a structural explanation of the 1991-1995 Yugoslavian civil war is possible — an explanation which grants the people their humanity and experience. This should be a prerequisite for any serious debate about the region and a touchstone for any social-activist endeavour within it.

FROM OCCUPATION TO SELF-MANAGEMENT

Josip Broz Tito, the Moscow-educated son of Croat-Slovene descent, was the leader of the FRY from 1945 until his internationally-mourned passing in 1981. Tito was the Kremlin-supported head of the small but well-organized Communist Party of Yugoslavia, a party which, in its guerrilla days during the bloody Nazi occupation of 1941-1945, managed to tie down several German divisions in and around the rugged

War, massacre and social suffering are not natural to regions but fall out from economic and political forces.

mountains of Bosnia. This ability to organize effective resistance was immortalized in first-hand historical accounts by Fitzroy MacLean and Milovan Djilas. The eventual success of the Yugoslavians to create and cultivate a unique society based on a mixed economy and aspects of worker self-management earned them kudos from liberals in the West. Yugoslavia was one of the inaugural members of the United Nations, positioned rather insecurely between the United States and the Soviet Union, once Tito fell out of favour with Stalin in 1948. Despite dependence upon US loans, the Yugoslavian economy achieved unprecedented economic and social growth from 1950-1971, a time when social welfare amongst modern industrialized nations was on the rise.

Yugoslavia's "market socialist" economy, dependent as it was on US loans in order to maintain its non-aligned position during the Cold War, was susceptible to erratic shifts in inflation. This frequently required the institution of macro-economic stabilization policies which limited the funds required for the maintenance of a stable standard of living. Yugoslavia was a loose confederation of six autonomous republics (Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, and Montenegro) with its centre in Belgrade, Serbia. Belgrade, accordingly, oversaw trade and monetary issues, but apart from this held little power to control such things as education, agriculture and manufacturing. The various republics were entrusted with these different areas of control as a way of securing and catering to their formal political autonomy. Even so, some of the revenue from the republics was

taxed as a means to maintain federal spending and pan-Yugoslav propaganda. When federal budgets were wanting, the republics had to ante up for their maintenance. This led to political tensions within the federation that prided itself on being founded on the ideal of brotherhood and unity.

Susan Woodward argues that this fragile relationship between two levels of government was not based primarily on ethnic tensions among the six republics, but rather revolved around shifts in economic policy priorities. The OPEC oil crisis, and the related advent of chronic stagflation (high inflation, low consumer demand and high unemployment), forced the federal government into implementing austere anti-inflation policies. After 1975, repayment of debt was hampered by the West's lack of interest in Yugoslav goods, and trade with oil countries trumped other economic exchanges. The republics were in need of federally-procured World Bank funds in order to service their debts.

This created fears of recentralization among the republics, which were otherwise appeased politically with the modern era's possibly most generous (and longest) constitution. The 1974 Yugoslav constitution all but devolved every last vestige of political and cultural authority to the republics, delivering a structural blow to any sense of pan-Yugoslav identity. The economic centralization and politico-cultural decentralization of the 1970s occurred against the all-too-obvious reality of uneven economic development. The richer republics, Slovenia and Croatia, were far closer to the standard of living exhibited in Western Europe compared with Macedonia, Bosnia, and the Albanian-populated province of Kosovo. International trade tended to favour the more developed republics, increasing economic tensions among them. ★

In the next issue of *New Socialist*, Rade Zinaic will continue by looking at the role of the US and the IMF, and the escalation of the crisis and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans.

Mujeres Creando

Feminist struggle in Bolivia

BY JEFFERY R. WEBBER

TRANSLATED BY JEFFERY R. WEBBER AND SHEILA WILMOT

Mujeres Creando, or Women Creating, is a small group of anarcho-feminist women fighting for social change in Bolivia. Two of its leading figures are among only a few openly lesbian activists in the country. The group embraces a diversity of struggles, as Julieta Ojeda pointed out in a separate 2002 interview: "So with our starting point as women and our identities as women, we can assert our own struggles and fight against oppressions in society. We also recognized that we come from a particular social class, that we have our own ethnic origins, that we are different ages, and that we are part of society. In this sense, we don't only struggle for women's rights or issues that affect women, but against all types of oppression." Jeffery R. Webber caught up with two activists in the *Mujeres Creando* Café/House/Cultural Centre in downtown La Paz on June 29, 2005.

JRW: *I am here with Julieta Ojeda and Florentina Alegre. To start off, can you describe some important aspects of your personal life that led you to become activists in this organization?*

JO: So, how did we become involved in the group, right? I have been active in *Mujeres Creando* (MC) for more than 12 years and one thing that stood out for me was the creative way that women were brought together in this period [when I was first introduced to the group]. Three comrades (*compañeras*) had started the group and were doing murals and other activities within the university. I got close to the group because while I had been looking for a left-wing group to get involved in, I hadn't found one previously that met my expectations. But MC really knew how to make me question and think through if I wanted to be involved

with the group. So, I did and have been active now for 12 years.

JRW: *And you?*

FA: My name is Florentina Alegre, I come from the countryside but I have been coming into the city since I was quite young, not to live here, but because I was a peasant union leader. I would go back and forth between the city and the country. In 1980, the union founded an internal women's peasant organization called *Bartolina Sisa**, and this is where I started to try to organize other women, as well as to do my own political development, from 1980 to 1990. Since 1995 I have been a leader at various levels: in my own community, as well as at the provincial, departmental [state], and federal levels.

Joining MC 6 or 7 years ago was a result of men's discrimination and humil-

iation. The peasant union organization was supposedly parallel with the men's and women's union organization, but within the women's one, we were in reality subjugated to the male leadership of the other one. I didn't like it much, they didn't let us breathe, they didn't let us organize autonomously.

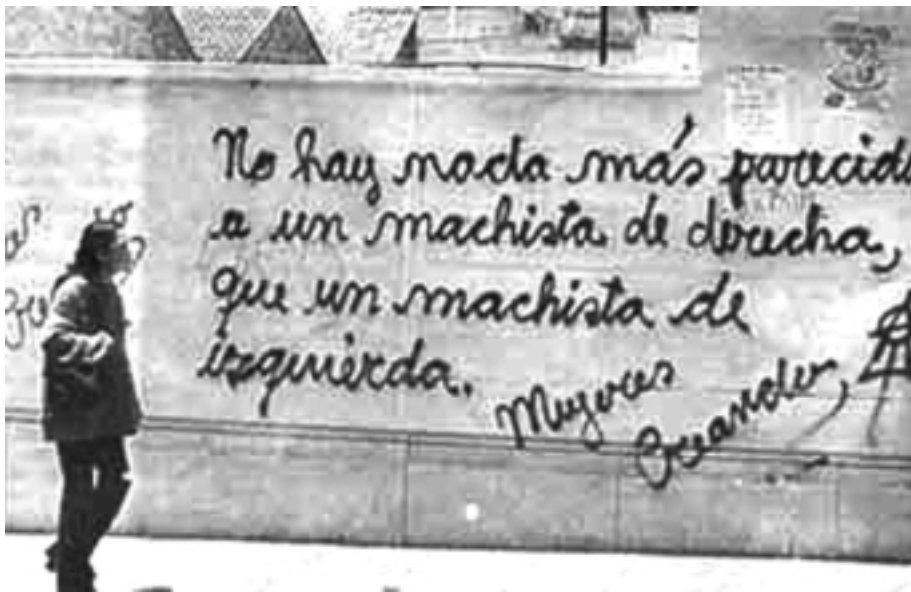
JRW: *And how did MC get started? What is the group's history?*

JO: MC was founded and developed more or less in 1992, by 3 Leftist comrades who brought with them a whole critique of the Left, of women's roles within our traditional Left groups, for example, the fact that we tend to have only secondary roles to carry out, as secretaries, serving tea, or putting up posters, generally doing the jobs that we always do. The other issue is that women function as sexual booty on the Left.

So, the group's founders themselves had had to leave the country for political (including sexual) reasons, and when they came back more or less 5 years later, they founded MC because they felt the need to organize as women, to create something new, not something that would replace the revolutionary subject – who is supposed to be the working class, according to Leftist groups. Instead, the group wanted to constitute itself as a vehicle for change, one that would contribute to social change working with others, but from a feminist perspective. Since then we've been going through a series of stages and steps to arrive at this point 14 years later.

JRW: *Right, and who were these founding*

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Mujeres Creando Graffiti in La Paz: "Theres nothing more like a Right-wing macho than a Left-wing macho."

women?

JO: They were Maria Galindo, Julieta Paredes and Mónica Mendoza, three comrades who had been active in Leftist groups.

JRW: So, now, and during the period since its foundation, what have been the politics and ideology of MC?

JO: MC has various axes: the issue of autonomy, heterogeneity, union of what is considered manual and intellectual work, and the use of creativity as a tool for struggle.

On the one hand, with regard to the issue of autonomy, as feminists we put forward that we are autonomous from any hegemonic centre of power in our society, whether it's the State, political parties or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), because we believe that autonomy is what is going to allow organizations to move forward much better.

Having made this criticism, we can just look at what happened in October [2003, mass mobilization – "Gas War" – that ousted president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada] and May and June [2005, another mass mobilization that ousted president Carlos Mesa]. In this later era, social movements are in fact starting to question themselves about the issue of political parties and the role of the political system in our society. We've done that for a number of years. So we believe in

autonomy as an organizing form that is going to allow us to grow and foster the development of our organization, in a way in which our ideas and selves are not subordinated to a male leader's political control or the leader's or party's control of money. Therefore, autonomy is important, and even more so in the case of women's organizations.

There is also the idea of heterogeneity. We don't believe in organizing between women in one sector, or only with establishing certain academic affinities. No, because we believe in uniting different women: Aymara** women, peasant women, students, young women, older women, professional women, women who only recently have begun their polit-

We believe in uniting different women: Aymara women, peasant women, students, young women, older women, professional women, women who only recently have begun their political formation.

ical formation. So, that is the heterogeneity that we recognize first off. We believe that this strengthens our analysis of social reality while permitting us to attack the system from different sides.

For example, various times when we've talked about land or indigenous territory, Florentina will raise issues, will have proposals relating to that theme, or, when we're talking about a problem of racism, or these kinds of things. We have diversity within the group that allows us to raise various issues. We don't limit ourselves to 3 or 4 themes like they do in the international organizations [NGOs concerned with gender, the United Nations work on gender and so on]. International organizations tell you if you want to be a feminist, or work with other women, you have to work on 3 or 4 themes, such as reproductive rights, abortion, and maybe one more little theme, right? But we as women believe that we are capable of engaging with reality and have our opinion and our position with respect to whatever theme that rises to the national agenda!

Then, there is the theme of uniting manual and intellectual work. In some ways this has allowed us to maintain our political autonomy because we are not economically dependent [on NGOs, international organizations, or the government.] We have received concrete help for certain little things, but we do not live off international aid, we live off our work and this house [café, cultural centre in La Paz], for example, sustaining ourselves with the work that we do.

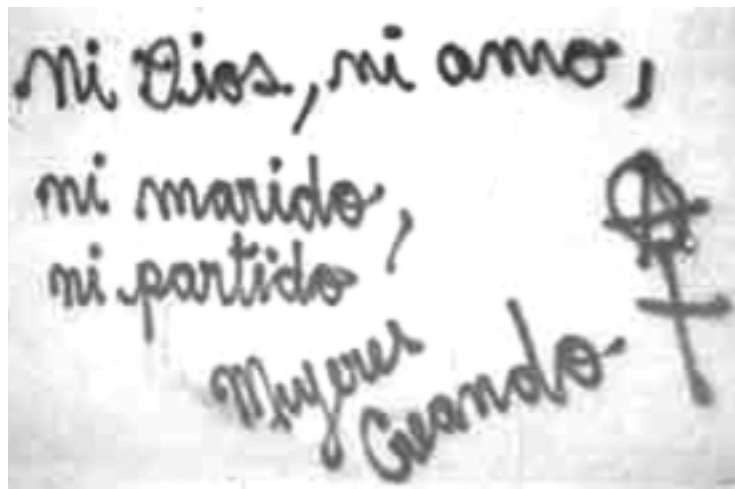
Then, there is creativity. We occupy public space. Public space is occupied by society here: the use of the streets, like vendors selling goods, lovers in the streets, people passing time being in the streets, resting in the street. So, for us, it is the optimal place to do politics, to occupy the street. We have occupied space through our graffiti and through creative, direct collective actions. I don't know if you've had the opportunity to see any of these. [Julieta continues this section with a biting critique of the "gender technocracy" that NGOs promote while pretending to represent the "women's movement" as a whole.]

FA: Another part of this is that in our society, everything is coordinated so that women are supposed to always be

submissive. Or, if women have demands those demands are always appropriated [by NGOs, the state, etc.]. However, in MC we have our own voice. This is the most important thing. We act with our own voice. For example, we demand land rights for women, zero interests for peasant women in debt, security for the women prostitutes working at night, among others. We direct these demands, these proposals, at the State, at the government. And so this is very important to us, this other form of doing politics. Within MC, and also within the feminist movement, we practice solidarity and honesty, a solidarity and honesty that is lacking in many of the Bolivian social movements.

Often this is why there is division between leaders, fights around personal interests, people always seeking more power. In MC there is no leader, no one who heads the group. We all decide equally. There is no comrade who leads us. Each comrade is like all the others, everyone equal and capable of deciding. So we don't have a structure like the social movements with leaders, with execu-

"Neither God, nor master, nor husband, nor party."



tives....

JRW: *Do you see the struggle against capitalism as being a part of your struggle as well?*

JO: Yes, because we believe in social change.... It's like our position on the international organizations around women. They have a technocratic vision. They believe that change can be fostered within the system by making certain

reforms, with a certain rhetoric of gender. Against this, we argue that transformation, that dramatic social change is possible. We develop our own forms, our own strategies and our own objectives.

We have concrete objectives for concrete change that arise from the demands of social movements, ones that want to coordinate their struggles with ours, that want to build on the struggles that we have put forward.

But, in the longer term, we also believe in the transformation of the society. And we try to live the utopia that we want, that we dream of, that we think through. We try to put it in practice everyday here. Obviously, it's a daily struggle, it's not as though we've done it. It's a daily struggle for solidarity, reciprocity, like how we manage this space [the café and cultural centre] as a cooperative, including the idea that there are no hierarchies among us, that there is respect, no racism, no classism.

And something that I think is truly anti-capitalist is the concept of reciprocity. This is a way of attacking the system, the capitalist system. None of us receive a salary. We all work in this space because of conviction. Obviously, we generate a little money by selling things [coffee, desserts, magazines and books] to maintain the house, but that's basic right? We say that we are against capitalism, and obviously we are against capitalism. ★

ENDNOTES

* Bartolina Sisa was the consort or partner of Túpaj Katari, a central figure in the anti-colonial insurrection of 1780-81.

** The "Aymara" people make up the second largest indigenous group in Bolivia.

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TV REVIEW: DA VINCI'S CITY HALL

Sidling up to the ambiguities of power

DA VINCI'S CITY HALL
CBC TV SERIES

REVIEWED BY
SUSAN FERGUSON

The CBC web site for *Da Vinci's City Hall* announces "From the low track to the fast lane, from the back alleys to the corridors of power, join Dominic Da Vinci as he takes you behind the closed doors where the deals that shape the city are made and broken."

Well, yes, *Da Vinci* is mayor of Canada's third largest city, Vancouver. And yes, he *has* left behind his cluttered, glass-walled digs (where he resided for six seasons as Vancouver coroner on *Da Vinci's Inquest*) for a lush red leather chair in a spacious wood-paneled office.

In so doing, not only has *Da Vinci*, a former cop with left-leaning sympathies and bad hair (played by actor Nicholas Campbell), lost the transparency and accessibility those glass walls symbolized, but he's no longer in a position to push up against the power structure from the outside. Rather, he is planted firmly within it – and it's a whole new ball game.

BACK ALLEYS OF POWER

But in another sense, not all that much has changed. Indeed, the chief genius of both *Inquest* and *City Hall* lies in showing us that the back alleys and corridors of power are just two sides of the same coin.

And in relieving *Da Vinci* of his coroner duties and saddling him with the

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Nicholas Campbell plays fictional Vancouver mayor, Dominic Da Vinci on CBC's *Da Vinci's City Hall*.

He's going to have to make a few deals with the devil to get what he wants.

perks and problems of public office, the show's creators have brought the dilemma of social democracy – that is, the attempt to reform the system from within – to the small screen.

City Hall, thus, offers an even deeper appreciation than *Inquest* did of who's ultimately pulling the strings – and the complex web through which that power is brokered. Many of you won't be surprised to hear that the council and councilors whom we typically associate with municipal politics (that is, the supposed life and blood of representative democracy) hardly ever appear on the show.

As mayor, *Da Vinci* maintains his do-goodist sensibilities and blunt, crumpled

Colombo-like persona. This goes a long way toward establishing him as an outsider among the slicker, more politically "pragmatic" types he now runs with.

But it doesn't take long – in fact, it took only about 15 minutes into the first episode – before we see signs that he's going to have to make a few deals with the devil to get what he wants.

And, appropriately enough for a show about municipal politics, his first Beelzebub comes in the form of a wealthy developer. Determined to save a threatened racetrack (and the jobs it delivers), the new mayor starts to cozy up to the developer, a man even his handlers don't entirely trust. Over the next few episodes, *Da Vinci* becomes increasingly indebted to him, setting the stage perhaps for a more major capitulation.

COUNTLESS STORYLINES

But the power of the wealthy is not the only pressure the new mayor must learn to live with. Police Chief Bill Jacobs (Brian Markinson), an arrogant tightwad

with no love for the former coroner, flexes his muscles by, among other things, refusing to effectively police Da Vinci's pet project, a legal red light district.

Meanwhile, Da Vinci's plans to replace Jacobs backfire when the chief's key aide helps to orchestrate a police union backlash over the mayor's plan to cross-train cops and firefighters. This particular tug of war is fascinating for the way in which it is played out entirely through rumours and backroom negotiations.

Those are just two of the countless storylines – seven were introduced in the first episode alone. While there's less of the street in *City Hall* than there was in *Inquest* (and fewer dead bodies), a number of the stories stem from Da Vinci's old stomping ground, Vancouver's impoverished Downtown Eastside.

Only now, Nick (played by Ian Tracey), the *Inquest* cop who lived for a while out of his truck, is the new coroner while the prime homicide team is made up Nick's former partner Angela (Venus Terzo), and Joe (Patrick Gallagher).

And, as with the previous series, which for example built one of its main stories around Vancouver's missing prostitutes, *City Hall* draws heavily on actual crime and political intrigue. (The concept for the series, in fact, draws from the "real life" coroner, Larry Campbell, who was Vancouver's mayor from 2002 to 2005.)

The squat in the abandoned Woodward's department store is inspiration for a storyline about the homeless and anti-poverty activists. In another, a teenaged girl is accused of being the ring leader of a gay bashing, an incident that evokes the beating and murder of 14-year-old Reena Virk by a group of her schoolmates.

RACE, CLASS AND GENDER IN THE FOREFRONT

Both *Inquest* and *City Hall* are known for their social realism. Along with characters that allow for ambiguity, nuance and serpentine, multilayered and sometimes unresolved plots, that approach has placed issues of class, race and gender in the forefront.

Both series showcase probably the most diverse casts on TV, with oppressed groups represented both inside and outside the system in equal measure. But more than that, the shows' plots are often built around those unequal social relations. For instance, Nick is now on the trail of another city developer, whom he suspects is implicated in a sex scandal involving aboriginal boys.

Still, there are a number of things I miss about the old show. I miss Helen, Da Vinci's former secretary in the coroner's office (played by Sarah Strange). Smart, wry and lacking the usual TV

glamour-gal look, she was simply a great female character. Her *City Hall* parallel, Da Vinci's chauffeur, may have some of those qualities, but she hasn't clinched it for me yet.

Having dropped Helen, in fact, the new series highlights a weakness in its portrayal of women more generally: while the men run the gamut of body sizes, looks and ages, the women all fit the same mold – pretty, thin 20- or 30-somethings, usually with well coiffed hair cascading over their shoulders. (Although she sports shorter hair, the lesbian cop is particularly attractive.)

And the dialogue has changed ever so slightly. While it still is eons ahead of the stuff you get almost anywhere else on TV for its laidback, imperfect cadence and phrasing, it has nonetheless inched up a notch in slickness. There aren't as many pauses, ums and such. There's not nearly as much to-and-fro banter as the characters work through a dilemma, rehearsing, for example, just exactly how a body ended up in a sewer. The dialogue is more assertive, less communicative – just a tad.

The treatment of class, however, is particularly interesting in *City Hall* because of Da Vinci's decidedly more ambiguous class loyalties. Sidling up with the rich and famous is something the coroner did very rarely. The mayor, however, does so regularly. And it is to the credit of the show's creators that he seems to enjoy it, without apology, including literally getting into bed with capital as he sleeps with the city's major AIDS benefactress (apparently a one-night stand).

NOTHING INNOCENT

Moreover, there's nothing innocent about such encounters as they're often a way to deploy a deeper appreciation of class issues. The scene of a high society AIDS benefit is inter-cut with a scene of the cops raiding the squat and beating up the homeless (unbeknownst to, and against the express wishes of, the mayor).

As we see Zack, the retired cop Da Vinci has sent down to keep an eye on things, being bashed with a nightstick, Da Vinci and his hostess slip out onto the balcony of her swanky condo for a few moments in private – clearly setting up an overarching theme of *City Hall*: just how seductive wealth and power prove to be to the new mayor.★

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MOVIE REVIEW: THE ISLAND

The commodification of bodies

THE ISLAND
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL BAY

REVIEWED BY
CLARICE KUHLING

The *Island* is an action-packed science-fiction flick about the commodification (the producing of something to be bought and sold on the market) of bodies and labour. It is also a story of resisting this commodification and of self-liberation. Its central themes prompt us to explore our own social practices and reexamine fundamental questions: how do we identify and transform the types and sites of commodification in our own lives? How do those who are unfree become capable of self-liberation and begin to free themselves?

The two main protagonists, LincolnSixEcho played by Ewan McGregor and JordanTwoDelta played by Scarlett Johansson are residents of a futuristic “community” which has ostensibly survived a massive contamination. Everyday life here is rigidly regimented. Sleeping habits, nutrition, health and behaviour are routinely monitored by one of the many surveillance devices positioned throughout the complex. “Remember, be polite, pleasant, peaceful. A healthy person is a happy person” an anonymous female voice breathes huskily over the loudspeaker. Everyone is allocated the same attire, and different foods are dispensed to each individual so as to maximize physical well-being. Sleeping quarters are segregated on the basis of gender. “Rules of proximity” govern



sexual behaviour by limiting the amount of time and extent of physical contact with others. Many of the designated jobs consist of the mundane yet mysterious task of “feeding the nutrient lines”. In their leisure time they fraternize at the local “bar” – all to the backdrop of attractive servers, unusual drinks, vibrant coloured lights, music and exotic settings projected onto the walls. One of the highlights of their lives is “The Lottery”, where the winner is sent to The Island (“nature’s last pathogen free zone”), an apparently beautiful and exciting escape from the mundanity of daily routines.

Yet the alluring settings and occasional Lottery cannot erase the recurring nightmares that Lincoln starts having. He asks his friends at work the question, “Where do these tubes go, anyways?” and of his doctor, “Tuesday night is tofu night and who decides we have tofu, and what is tofu anyway? Who cleans my laundry and folds it, who is this person? I want to know answers and I wish there was more. More than just waiting to go to The Island!” Indeed, Lincoln’s distress at work

echoes the distress many workers in our society feel about the lack of control in the workplace, that the conditions under which we labour, as well as what and how we produce and distribute, are never democratically controlled.

The boat in Lincoln’s nightmares, The Renovatio (Latin for “rebirth”), as well as the butterfly (an ancient symbol for “awakening”) which he finds one day, both foreshadow his shift in consciousness and serve as plot devices which enable him to awaken to the real nightmare about his horrifying role in life. He and all of his peers are actually clones, “grown” as a type of insurance policy for their “sponsor” for the sole purpose of providing wealthy elites with the necessary organs, skin and tissue to extend their lives a half century longer. In other instances, the female clones are created to serve as living, walking wombs, for those wealthy women who cannot, or do not wish to, bear children themselves. In every case, however, once their role as surrogate mother or organ donor is complete, all clones are eliminated and discarded, like any other used “product”. For in this version of the future, keeping such a clone alive after her/his “use” has expired, is an extraneous and inefficient cost that any “reasonable” shareholder or investor would seek to eliminate. Ultimately, Lincoln discovers ‘The Lottery’ is nothing but a cynical ruse, designed to placate the clones into accepting the present state of affairs (“giving them hope and purpose” as Dr. Merrick, CEO of Merrick BioTech later admits), while they live out their lives hidden in a discarded military bunker underground (the hidden abode of production and reproduction?) - until such time that the organs are required to fill this new niche market “need”.

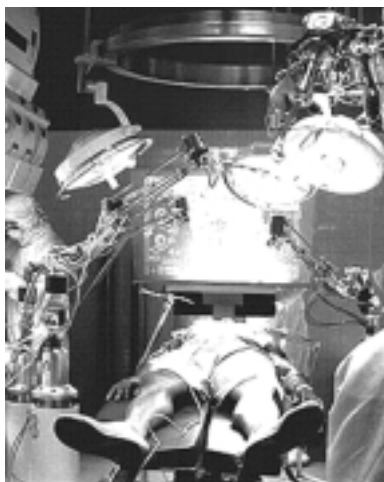
In the fictitious world depicted in this film, we see the eternalizing, expansionary logic of capital expressed through the imperial ambitions of the rich in their

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efforts to extend their lives and their reach into the future. Here we have a kind of reformulated(cannibalistic?) “service” economy: rather than goods and services produced for human consumption, here we have humans produced literally for “consumption” by other humans. Indeed, the Marxist insight that capital devours the bodies and sucks the life out of workers is given literal expression in this film. Here, the living wealthy elites feed off the flesh (or harvested organs) of the soon-to-be dead (the walking undead haunted by the daily spectre of death?). Or, inversely, we have the seemingly boundless appetite of (dead) capital devouring the living (like vampires? zombies?) to ensure its continual profits.

Furthermore, Lincoln and his friends’ exploitation is twofold. In the first instance, they labour for free unknowingly helping to (re)produce other clones and thereby enriching the profits for Merrick BioTech. Here, their labour is a means to serve the larger ends of producing more “product” and profit for the company, and for producing a longer life for those who can pay. But in addition, they serve as an end in itself, a commodity and object to be harvested, literally chopped up, disassembled and sold.

While we may dismiss the world depicted in this film as having no correlation to our present circumstances, we must ask ourselves if there is any correspondence between the two. While examples such as the commodification of our air, water, forests, land and other natural resources readily come to mind, other forms such as biopiracy (patenting of life forms), the international sex trade, global sweatshops, migrant labour (often affecting women of colour most adversely) are sometimes less obvious forms. The social process by which human labour power is reduced to a thing to be purchased is much less understood and discussed. With routine casualness we accept a set of social and economic practices which attach a price to our skills and capacities. And despite the indisputable irony of a film which engages in an enormous amount of product placement at the same time as it critiques the exploitation of humans as products (note the presence of Puma, MSN, Nokia etc.), this does not erode



Harvesting organs for the rich.

our ability to formulate a critical reading of the film – a reading which understands the capitalist market as a realm characterized more by domination and coercion than by freedom and choice.

For Lincoln, the knowledge that he is nothing but a vessel of organs and tissue to be harvested, is a “profane illumination” – an experience of shocking revelation which jolts him into seeing and acting in the world in a fundamentally new way. “There is no island!” he cries, upon learning that his role in life means certain death. His exposure to the previously unseen social forces and relations in which he is enmeshed enables him to begin acquiring a more comprehensive, illuminating account of his world and its workings. It is unfortunate that Lincoln’s self-consciousness and awareness is largely attributed to biological origins (a synaptic scan reveals that memories are growing in his brain, memories which are actually his sponsor’s), rather than understood as a social phenomenon, acquired through our activity in the world. Nevertheless, the film shows that as Lincoln begins asking questions, others start questioning their existence too. As a metaphor for awareness/self-consciousness, then, Lincoln’s process of remembering can be read as a challenge to capital’s attempts to extend the exchange principle into every pore and crevice of human life, its assertion that there is nothing beyond or outside of the commodity form and its efforts to position people as commodities. Lincoln’s act of remembering, then, is a challenge and a threat to what the capitalist system

would have us forget: that an economic system cannot possibly circumscribe and contain all resistance and activity. In this way, the slogan “never lose hope”, which is used at the beginning of the movie to induce obedience, is at the end of the movie subverted and recuperated to serve the goal of social transformation.

We can also criticize the film for reproducing once again the misguided notion that a small cadre (our two protagonists) of enlightened leaders can and should transform society. However, Jordan’s exclamation near the end of the movie, “The island is real, it’s us!” perhaps should be read not only as an assertion of their own agency as actors in making social change rather than as spectators, but as an affirmation of the necessity of collective, mass, democratic action of working/oppressed people in making social change ourselves (ie. the island is all of us). And Jordan and Lincoln, acting on John Donne’s observation that “no man (sic) is an island” return home to prevent their peers from dying at the hands of Dr. Merrick, even when they could have taken over their sponsor’s lives and never returned. Unlike Merrick, they choose class solidarity and unity over individual salvation and self-aggrandizement, despite the personal risks. If Lincoln and Jordan embody the slogan “an injury to one is an injury to all”, then Merrick is the embodiment of individualism and hyper rationality upon which the formulation of white male western identity is founded. Echoing capital’s insistence that it gives birth to itself, that it creates itself out of itself and it alone (not human bodies) produces its own wealth, Merrick hubristically (and ironically) makes similar claims: “I brought you into this world and I can take you out of it!” he seethes, right before he dies.

When finally they all emerge from the bunker into the light of day for the first time after their insurgency from below is victorious, we are amazed and joyful at how far they’ve journeyed and what they’ve accomplished. Even if we are aware that the project of self-liberation is always unfinished, this film reminds us that there are always forces of and possibilities for social transformation inherent in any system, no matter how seemingly circumscribed these possibilities might at first seem. ★

BOOK REVIEW: CANADA AND EMPIRE

Waging war on Haiti's poor majority

WAGING WAR ON THE POOR MAJORITY:

CANADA IN HAITI

BY YVES ENGLER AND ANTHONY FENTON

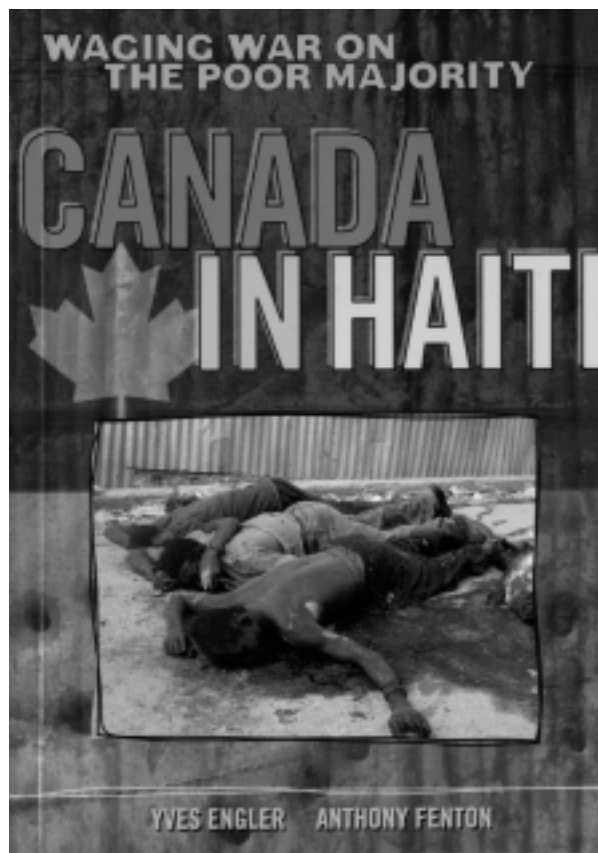
REVIEW BY HAROLD LAVENDER

"In both their writing and activism, Yves Engler and Anthony Fenton have done some of the most important work in exposing Canada's shameful role in Haiti," writes Naomi Klein about Canada in *Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority*, co-authored by Fenton and Engler.

This pointed 120-page book is essential reading for those who wish to hold the Liberal government accountable for its anti-democratic, imperialist intervention in Haiti.

In the wake of an invasion by heavily armed paramilitaries, former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide says he was kidnapped and removed from Haiti by US forces on February 29, 2004. Supporting both the coup and the repressive new regime were Canada's Liberal government and NGOs cooperating with anti-Aristide forces.

In challenging Canada's so-called "peacekeeper" role, *Canada in Haiti* reveals how the Liberal government propped up and provided legitimacy to the anti-democratic Haitian regime currently engaged in massive human rights violations.



LIBERATION THWARTED

Fenton and Engler begin by acknowledging the Haitian people who created the First Nation of Free People in the Americas in a slave rebellion (1791 to 1804). The great powers sought to place an embargo on that regime. Eventually, the US occupied Haiti (1915 to 1934) and left in place the modern Haitian army. The Haitian army installed the Duvalier dictatorship in 1957. In 1986, mass protests forced his son "Baby Doc" Duvalier (who had taken over when "Papa Doc" died in 1971) into exile. The people finally appeared to have their say when they elected Aristide president in 1990.

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However, Haitian generals overthrew Aristide in 1991, using paramilitaries to institute a reign of terror. Widespread international opposition prompted US President Clinton to restore Aristide, although with many strings attached (including those from international lending agencies).

George W. Bush barred more than \$500 million in aid and loans to the elected Haitian government and his administration launched a destabilization campaign. However, when the US became embroiled in Iraq, Washington was happy to let Canada take a leading role in Haiti. Canada, with its cleaner, supposedly democratic international reputation, was better able to pull the wool over people's eyes.

But Canada is no force for democracy

in Haiti. In 2003, Fenton and Engler write, "Denis Paradis, Canada's Secretary of State for Latin America and La Francophonie, played host to a high-level roundtable meeting dubbed the 'Ottawa Initiative on Haiti.' In a manner that would foreshadow future meetings hosted by the Canadian government, no representatives of Haiti's elected government were invited." *L'Actualité* reported that same year that Paradis and the French Minister of the Francophonie discussed a potential trusteeship over Haiti and the return of Haiti's military. Paradis would later deny the report, saying the issue fell under the "Responsibility to Protect."

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

According to this Canadian doctrine,

when a state fails to protect its people, the world community and the UN have a responsibility to step in. But the question is: who is being protected from whom?

Canada in Haiti demonstrates that the Haitian crisis was manufactured by elite domestic opposition forces, working in concert with foreign governments, international financial institutions, the international press and NGOs. Canada was deeply implicated in the destabilization campaign that ultimately led to the failure of the Haitian economy and state.

USING NGOS TO DESTROY DEMOCRACY

The book reveals the US imperialist strategy of using funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to openly support groups that had once been covertly funded by the CIA, and to undermine any initiative that could even vaguely threaten US power. But the authors stress the Canadian government is no exception. They document and attack the role of CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) in Haiti: "It appears that in the eyes of the Canadian government, 'civil society' was in effect equated with opposition to Haiti's elected government.... Civil society groups supportive of Lavalas [Aristide's followers] simply did not receive development money."

The authors also slam the record of some supposedly progressive Canadian NGOs, which are heavily dependent on government funding. A report by Rights and Democracy, formerly headed by the NDP's Ed Broadbent, for example, calls the opposition G-184 "grassroots" and a "promising civil society movement." But G-184 was financed by the International Republican Institute and headed by the country's leading sweatshop owner and right-winger, Andy Apaid.

WORKING AS REPRESSORS

Five hundred Canadian soldiers joined the occupation of Haiti in 2004, before being replaced by a multinational United Nations force, MINUSTAH. They did little to disarm the right-wing paramilitaries who had helped oust Aristide.

Although their initial goal focused on rebuilding the Haitian National Police (HNP), the US, French and Canadian goal is to restore the Haitian army as an

effective force of repression. The authors note that 500 former soldiers have already been incorporated into the HNP, with plans for 500 to 1,000 more to be hired.

Meanwhile, aid has been flowing to the new regime. The US lifted a 13-year arms embargo against Haiti and, in June 2005, the US and Canada officially presented the HNP with over \$2 million worth of equipment.

Canada also trains and assists the police. Some 100 Canadian officers are currently in Haiti as part of a UN civilian police force led by David Beer of the RCMP. Beer previously served in Iraq assisting counter-insurgency efforts.

One might think that UN peacekeeping forces would attempt to control police excesses, but this is not the case. Instead they have protected the HNP and joined in armed attacks on poor areas that are hotbeds of support for ousted President Aristide. Residents of a poor Port-au-Prince neighbourhood reported finding 23 bodies after a July 6 UN force raid to kill "gang leader" Dread Wilme.

A recent report circulated by Haiti solidarity activists reports UN forces entered the teeming Cité du Soleil neighbourhood of 300,000 people, killing 15 and wounding dozens.

The book asks why the Canadian government is so directly implicated.

Haiti, unlike Iraq, doesn't have vast strategic resources. But the authors say that those who stand to gain from slavery, racism and colonialism, imperialism and today's neo-liberalism have sought to undermine Haiti as an example and block the promise of its independence. And in 2004 they believed they could get away with it again.

The authors do not idolize Aristide or the record of Lavalas, the pro-Aristide party. However, they make a case that the regime (despite lack of funds and IMF strings) served the poor majority better than previous dictatorships or the new regime. They argue Aristide did not kowtow sufficiently to the neo-liberal agenda. His removal has led to attempts to fast-track a drastic program of privatization.

So-called future economic development in Haiti will be based on sweatshops utilizing the cheapest labour in the hemisphere. Canada is a player in this global

sweatshop game, particularly through Montreal-based Gildan Activewear, a large supplier of T-shirts. Gildan plans to employ up to 5,000 people in Port-au-Prince, including work subcontracted to Andy Apaid, the leader of the G-184 opposition. Two Canadian mining companies, KWG Resources and St. Guinevere Resources, are planning to mine copper and gold on very favourable terms.

Aristide's efforts to mobilize the poor majority were threatening to elite interests. In response, the Haitian elite want a strong military to protect their interests. So do Washington and Ottawa.

The authors point out Canada is being increasingly economically and militarily integrated with the US. For them, it is no accident that Ottawa's Initiative on Haiti took place at the same time the government was deciding not to send troops to Iraq. Some division of labour among imperialists must take place. But Haiti shows how much Canada is a partner in the global war on the poor.

POSSIBLE TO RESIST

The authors believe something can be done. Opposition is mounting in communities and countries with large black communities. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) refuses to recognize Gerard Latortue as prime minister of Haiti. So do the African Union, Cuba and Venezuela. Sixty-nine countries are demanding a UN investigation into the circumstances surrounding Aristide's departure. The US Congressional Black Caucus denounced the 2004 coup and highlighted post-coup human rights violations.

In Canada, the initial response was tiny, primarily centered within the Haitian community in Montreal. But the number of people willing to speak out and demonstrate is growing. There are now Haiti solidarity groups in 11 cities able to co-ordinate actions. Haiti Solidarity BC has increased its activities and works in close alliance with Vancouver Stop The War. Opposition to the coup against Aristide is widening into other sectors, including the labour movement.

The work of a dedicated few is slowly having an effect. ★

BOOK REVIEW

Thinking about Left history

REBELS, REDS, RADICALS: RETHINKING CANADA'S LEFT HISTORY

BY IAN MCKAY

PUBLISHED BY: BETWEEN THE LINES (2005).

REVIEW BY JIM NAYLOR

Socialists are deeply conscious of history. As Ian McKay argues in his engaging and thought-provoking *Rebels, Reds, Radicals*, leftists are by definition “non-contemporaneous.” They are profoundly aware of living within history, struggling to understand the patterns and lessons of the past, and hoping to use this knowledge to guide its future course. The social world is malleable; capitalism has a history and therefore, can have an end. More than this, socialists are conscious of living within a radical tradition. There is a shared sense of comradeship with those who have gone before and a feeling that the challenges that radicals have faced in the past speak directly to us.

The problem, McKay suggests, is that leftists have not been particularly good historians, at least when it comes to exploring what we need to comprehend about Canada's radical past. The stories of past struggles have been recounted in books and pamphlets written by activists and academics of all stripes. But are they helpful in building twenty-first century socialisms or, as he suggests, do they act as fetters on our understanding by uncritically replicating old labels and assumptions?

I'm sympathetic to McKay's concerns. Radical history, even the best, is a minefield for the uninitiated. The language leftists use to describe themselves and their milieu: revolutionaries, reformists, communists, social democrats, anarchists, syndicalists, Trotskyists, Stalinists, and so on, are far from self-evident terms. And they are often used in an ahistorical, timeless sense. Far too many books, popular and academic, discuss the great twentieth-century struggle between social democrats and Communists (or in the Canadian context, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation/New Democratic Party versus the Communist Party of Canada/Labour Progressive Party) as if each of these traditions were frozen in time, unchanging decade after decade, unaffected by the changing material and intellectual worlds around them. Or they are allowed one shift, usually a great betrayal, such as the Stalinization of the Communist Party in the 1920s, or the abandonment of the ideals of the Regina Manifesto by the CCF in the 1950s as it morphed into the NDP.

These processes, of course, happened. But they are often presented in a manner that minimizes the great creativity of the left, and its great challenges. Besides targeting the intellectual carelessness reflected in assumptions that political labels carry timeless meaning, McKay decries the sectarian and sentimental



character of this writing. Although we may quibble about the epithets, it would be hard not to concede his point. Overtly or not, histories have been written as polemical tools, to demonstrate that one's own political tendency is not only right now, but was right in the past. Although often full of insight, the result is at best two-dimensional. Even academic literature tends to look at the past through the eyes of a single political tendency, and often reduce that tendency to a political strategy and program. And much radical history is written in a heroic genre, celebrating the role of individuals or organizations to build struggles and resist co-optation.

How do we write a more historical, and a more useful, history? The first step is to recognize the otherness of the past. Effective history recognizes that people in the past thought and acted differently than today. They lived in different worlds, read different books, and talked about ideas differently. And they came to their socialist conclusions differently. While McKay recognizes the validity of studying specific organizations or political currents, he urges us to write more generally, examining the paths that have been travelled by a very broadly defined “Left.” The liberal order, as Marxists would expect, has been challenged at the point of capitalist production, although class-based, workplace struggles account

Jim Naylor teaches history at Brandon University and is currently writing a history of the non-Stalinist Left in Canada in the 1930s and 1940s.

“Matrix-events” such as the emergence of monopoly capitalism, or wars and depressions, or the rise of the women’s movement, challenge fundamental questions about the social order creating new frameworks for understanding the world.

for only part of the story. Others became socialists through the fight against Tsarism in the Russian Empire, or because the “liberal order” perpetuated the national oppression of Quebecois or First Nations in Canada. Some came to reject capitalism because it came to conflict with their religious beliefs or because they drew socialist conclusions from their struggles for gender liberation. Still others came to socialism through international solidarity or simply because the irrationality of capitalism offended their notion of the possibilities of a better social order. Clearly, we are talking of broad, yet also historically specific, movements which shaped Canadian Leftisms. “Matrix-events” such as the emergence of monopoly capitalism, or wars and depressions, or the rise of the women’s movement, challenge fundamental questions about the social order creating new frameworks for understanding the world.

McKay undertakes what he calls a strategy of “reconnaissance,” attempting to probe each of these Left formations on their own terms, seeing what made them tick. By formations, he means something much broader than an organization or a single tradition, but rather what we might think of as an entire radical generation which would share assumptions about the world and about socialism. For instance, early twentieth-century socialists drawing not just on Marx, but on the political economist Henry George, the anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan and particularly the hugely influential sociology of Herbert Spencer, shared a social evolutionary view of the world. Although socialists had differences, debates drew on a shared language, and political activ-

ity revolved not so much around what we may consider either revolutionary or reformist politics, but around propaganda and education. Mastering the science of social evolution would result in fundamental change.

The success of the Russian Revolution challenged a second wave of socialists to develop a more activist idea of politics as well as new notions of the party. A third formation emerged in the 1930s, the product of both the Great Depression and Soviet industrialization. The role of the state, and of centralized planning by experts, took on a centrality that had been earlier lacking. These were features shared by the CCF and the Communist Party who, as much as they slagged each other, spoke a language each could understand. This became all the more the case as the language of comprehensive state planning and a Canadian nationalism supplanted an earlier language of class struggle for both tendencies. The breakthrough victory of the CCF in Saskatchewan and the strength of both the Communists and the CCF in the rapidly blossoming union movement, McKay suggests, marked the entry of the left into hegemonic politics.

The rise of a new left in the 1960s and 1970s represents a fourth formation, rooted in a response to the cold war and an identification with decolonization movements around the world. It explicitly rejected the old left’s assumptions, strategies and language. It was critical of the bureaucratization inherent in the third formation’s “planism” and thought more broadly about potential revolutionary agents and the meaning of radical democracy. The rise of a highly politi-

cized national movement in Quebec, for instance, reflected a willingness to understand how other oppressions undermined liberal capitalism. McKay is particularly keen on focusing on Quebec as key to this formation. Interestingly, McKay identifies socialist feminism as a separate, fifth formation, reflecting a new way of thinking about socialism which explored the relationship between the “public” and the “personal” in ways that no earlier formation had done.

Each formation, then, lived within its own intellectual, social and political universe, although they overlapped and interacted with each other. These earlier formations each had its own set of notions about what socialism was, and how to act politically. McKay judges the effectiveness of these formations on their ability to act as a counterhegemonic force to the existing liberal order, to have their ideas, assumptions and hopes shared beyond their own, relatively small, numbers. He counterposes this to the “scorecard” radical history which measures individuals and organizations in the past by what they got “right,” versus their “errors” according to our definition. The point is well taken, although it is difficult to see how we can avoid recognizing that some organizations were more insightful than others, and that their programmatic or theoretical developments can continue to serve us. There are several other observations or statements that *New Socialist* readers may take exception to in this book, particularly around questions of political incorporation and organization. At times McKay seems to underplay the power of the hegemonic liberalism he describes so well. He celebrates the influence that socialists have had on public policy and culture but has to acknowledge that “every major leftism in Canadian history has ultimately been digested by the liberal order.” McKay’s promised three volume reconnaissance of the Canadian Left, of which this volume is a kind of theoretical introduction, will allow socialists to understand the processes that created and undermined the Lefts of the past. The result will be new insights and, undoubtedly, new disagreements and new debate. The Left can only benefit.★

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