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SPRING 2007
Issue No. 60
$4.95
www.newsocialist.org

EDITORIAL

HOT AIR

The right blows smoke over climate change

Climate change is officially no longer what Prime Minister Stephen Harper has called an "emerging science." February marked a turning point in the politics of climate change denial with the release of a report by scientists from 113 countries. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that there is a 90 percent probability that climate change is caused by human activity. A "massive reduction in emissions" on the order of 70 to 80 percent is required to prevent the arrival of a catastrophic climatic "tipping point." This is far more drastic than the terms of the Kyoto Accord.

Climate change will lead to diverse consequences around the world, including increased temperatures, rising sea levels, and increases in disastrous weather, drought and famine. Canada's Arctic is a focal point, since climate change is happening faster and with more destabilizing impacts in this fragile environment. Ironically, the Arctic is also the current frontier for oil and gas development. The proposed Mackenzie Valley Pipeline is slated to carry gas reserves to northern Alberta, to be used to refine Alberta's oil sands—one of the globe's worst producers of greenhouse gases.

Meanwhile, the energy sector is reaping greater profits than ever. This is why corporations like ExxonMobil have, until recently, been silent financial backers of more than 30 climate-change-denial front groups. Recently, *The Globe and Mail* predicted that Canada's largest energy company, EnCana, reported the biggest annual profit in the country's history.

Clearly, corporate greed is the main culprit in the ongoing increases in greenhouse emissions. Yet the same market system that is the cause of the problem is being touted as a solution. The "cap and trade" system is enshrined in the Kyoto Accord. Corporations can buy credits (caps) for carbon dioxide emissions, and/or purchase unused credits from other companies (trade), or even acquire credits by investing in "green" projects in poor countries.

This is a license for the richest corporations to continue polluting. And the policy focus on the greening of the poorest nations is another disguised form of imperialism. It provides a new vehicle for austerity programs that victimize the world's poorest people—those least responsible for emissions and most affected by climate change.

The environment has returned to the top of the political agenda in Canada. In an attempt to win a majority in the House of Commons in the next election, Harper is attempting to banish the ghost of his previous incarnation as a climate-change denier and staunch opponent of Kyoto. He still maintains that Canada's 2012 Kyoto targets cannot be achieved. But Environment Minister John Baird affirms that the Conservatives "have no plans to get out of Kyoto." However, this is not even remotely close to the strong measures suggested by the IPCC report.

Mainstream environmentalists and politicians have long tended to shift responsibility for environmental sustainability onto individuals. A new fad in academic and government circles is promoting theories of "adaptation" and "resilience." According to a recent article in *Nature* magazine, "The obsession with researching and reducing the human effects on climate has obscured the more important problems of how to build more resilient and sustainable societies, especially in poor regions and countries."

Again, the focus is on the world's poorest nations as objects of imperial social engineering. Governments love this approach as it provides tools for coopting resistance to the depredations of global capital.

Is climate change bad for capital? Some pundits predict it will lead to a shrinkage in the global economy of up to 20 percent. But a new report by Barclays Capital predicts that the need to expand energy capacity while reducing dependence on hydrocarbons will lead to an "energy revolution" similar to the late 20th century "technology revolution." The report's author argues that the energy sector is poised to reap the biggest rewards from this technological change.

Barclays is pointing to the possibility of a global restructuring of capitalism in response to climate change. If this happens (and it is by no means certain that it will) workers and the poor will suffer terribly, much as they have in previous rounds of capitalist restructuring. Even if a huge shift to new technologies does take place, the profit-driven capitalist system, the root cause of the global ecological crisis, will continue to wreak havoc on nature and humanity.

We need to fight for deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions immediately. And we need to support the building of an anti-corporate wing within the environmental movement. But the real solution, the real "energy revolution," will require a social revolution that replaces capitalism with a system of production whose priorities are environmental sustainability and human need—what some call ecosocialism. ★

new ★ SOCIALIST

Issue 60: Spring 2007

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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 onlyt hrough their own struggles. For more information about the published of this magazine, the New Socialist Group, please see the inside back cover.

New Socialist is a member of the CMPA.
Printed at JT Printing, a union shop.

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LETTERS

New Socialist magazine welcomes letters.
Please send to the address or e-mail address on p3.

No support to racists, homophobes, women-haters

"Resistance in Iraq and Lebanon" (*NS* 59) offers socialists a deceptively simple, political orientation: which side are we on? That of imperialism or its combatants? The occupation forces, or Hezbollah, the Taliban and Baathist nationalists?

Pardon us if we demur at this simplistic and frankly outdated binary thinking. We are on the side of oppressed and exploited people everywhere. So we urge socialists to orient themselves independently, not to allow themselves to be forced into making a false choice among oppressors. We should position ourselves against imperialism in ways and by actions that do not simply support the replacement of one yoke by another.

As socialists we cannot ally with religious bigots, racists, homophobes and women-hating thugs abroad. We will not go out of our way to place a gun in the hands of an insurgent who aims it at occupation forces today but who, once victorious, will most certainly direct it at Iraqi, Lebanese or Afghan trade unionists or feminists tomorrow.

What should an Iraqi trade unionist, an Afghan feminist or a Lebanese democrat make of "socialist support" for their sworn enemies? What would Iranian leftists opposing that country's authoritarian regime make of "socialist support" for its repressive government? Do socialists hold their noses in contemptuous disregard for all emancipatory impulses save the struggle against imperialism? How is this message conducive to the propagation of a socialist movement, either here or abroad?

We oppose imperialism to show the oppressed nations that there are two Wests; that the "we" on the other side of the imperialist barricades is not united; that there are forces and movements that respect the right of nations everywhere to self-determination, but who strive to merge that struggle with the fight for complete freedom and equality for women, gays and lesbians and people of colour.

It is the political Right, whether ignorant or willfully mendacious, that equates our opposition to imperialism with an alleged support for Islamic fundamentalism. Let's not play into their hands. We must extend our support to those independent forces, no matter how weak today, which represent the possibility of a democratic future. And we look with dismay at those brothers and sisters who have lost confidence in the masses to fight, not for the mullahs, for Sharia and for the veil, but for national dignity and democracy.

Ravi Malhotra
John Baglow
P.A. Whiteley
Barry Finger
Jason Schulman
Justin Schwartz

PHOTO: ROBERT J. ALLISON

Feb. 17 march: The culmination of Israeli apartheid week in Toronto, the action highlighted the boycott of Chapters and Indigo whose major shareholders actively support the Israeli military. The third annual Israeli apartheid week featured lectures and events on campuses in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Hamilton. Similar events were held in New York City and on several campuses in the United Kingdom.

WHICH WAY FORWARD FOR THE UNION MOVEMENT?

In the following pages, we present two perspectives on the Canadian labour movement. Sebastian Lamb argues for building rank and file unionism as our best hope for reversing union retreat and Herman Rosenthal emphasizes the need for unions to push for a different kind of economy and different kinds of workplaces.

Building power in the workplace

BY SEBASTIAN LAMB

There is no doubt that workers in Canada and Quebec face daunting challenges.

Although average hourly wages are rising slightly faster than consumer prices, workers are moving backwards in many ways. The share of jobs with job security and medical, dental and pension benefits is shrinking. Employers are reducing benefits. Outsourcing is widespread. Workers are increasingly being pitted against each other, as direct competition between firms and regions intensifies. The threat of privatization hangs over the heads of many public sector workers. Multi-tasking and other ways of intensifying work are rampant. One in four men and one in ten women puts in 50 or more hours of paid work per week, and overtime is often unpaid.

Our lives outside the workplace are also getting harder. Cutbacks in healthcare and education are forcing workers, especially women, to put in more unpaid work taking care of the ill or elderly. There isn't enough quality affordable childcare.

In times like these, unions are critically important. They are the most important organizations workers can use to defend themselves and fight for improvements in the workplace. Three in ten workers are unionized, although this figure masks a real divide: 72 percent in the public sector, only 18 percent in the private sector.

UNIONS TODAY

But today the state of the union movement is cause for alarm. There are disturbing trends in collective bargaining and in what unions are and are not doing away from the bargaining table.

In recent years, unionized workers' wages have not quite kept up with inflation. Unionized workers have been under pressure from employers demanding more "flexibility" —more contracting-out, fewer, broader job classifications, pay linked to company profitability and other measures that make work more intense and less secure.

Most contracts negotiated in 2006 were at least three years long, and a large minority was four or more. In BC, the government was able to buy labour peace for the 2010 Olympics by offering bonus money tied to settling by March 31, when most public sector union contracts expired, and to signing four-year deals. Long contracts tend to make unions go to sleep because officials and staff call off membership mobilization once a contract is reached (most don't believe in mobilizing members to collectively enforce their contract rights on an ongoing basis, and members "getting out of control" frightens them). With no possibility of a legal strike until the contract expires, unionized workers with long contracts are even less able to use the threat of withdrawing their labour to make gains.

The last large-scale union fight-back was the inspiring October 2005 strike by BC teachers. Although sympathy strikes (strikes by one group of workers in support of another) have been banned since the 1940s, the BC division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) organized rotating regional walkouts to back the teachers—an act of solidarity that is as rare as it is significant **(see "Lessons from the BC Teachers Strike" by Harold Lavender in *New Socialist 55*; back issues are online at www.newsocialist.org)**.

Taking place a few months later, CUPE Ontario's campaign against changes to that province's municipal pension plan stands in stark contrast to the BC struggle. CUPE-O leader Sid Ryan threatened strike action but mobilization was poorly organized, with the leadership backing down at

Socialists and Unions

Socialists should work with others to build rank and file unionism, starting from where workers are at. This doesn't mean playing by conventional union rules, with socialist ideas about the world outside the workplace tacked on (as some socialists do). The point is to start from the current struggles and issues of workers and unions in order to build the forces for change from within and from below. Ongoing political discussion with other activists working for change is the most effective way to build a socialist current in the unions.

Sebastian Lamb is an editor of New Socialist. *Thanks to Euan Gibb, Alex Levant and Sheila Wilmot for comments on a draft of this article.*

the last minute. This kind of flip-flop demoralizes activists and breeds cynicism among workers, making it more difficult to convince members to prepare for action the next time.

Talk about a new political direction for labour—sparked by the NDP's move toward neoliberal "third way" policies, the experience of NDP provincial governments, the Ontario Days of Action against the Harris government and the global justice movement of 2000-2002—has ended, leaving few traces. Unions have fallen back on simply calling on workers to vote NDP to solve their problems. In 2006, the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), which had previously criticized the NDP from the left, were cozying up to the federal Liberals **(see Bruce Allen, "Inside the CAW Jacket" in *New Socialist 57*)**. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers' 2005 policy naming "global capitalism" as the enemy stands out as an exception to the trend.

Overall, the movement is retreating and disoriented, though not routed. Many union activists sense this. That's why outside challenger Carol Wall, with her call for mobilization and change, was able to garner 37 percent support in the vote for president at the 2005 Canadian Labour Congress convention even though the leaders of most unions told their members to reelect Ken Georgetti **(see Alex Levant, "Vote Stacked, Incumbent Wins" in *New Socialist 53*)**.

Regrettably, this stunning result didn't lead to any new activist initiatives. But there are "pockets of activists who are looking for projects that promise a way out of the defensiveness and resignation of the current period," as Barry Brennan has written in *Monthly Review* (June 2005).

Strategies For Change

Faced with this worrying situation, what is to be done?

Some on the left argue for a new political vision for the labour movement. NDP-style social democracy has capitulated to capital, and a socialist or anti-capitalist orientation is needed to navigate the treacherous waters of neoliberalism and develop a force for transforming society. For example, former CAW staffer Sam Gindin has argued for "sectoral strategies" as part of a socialist alternative economic agenda. This would involve creating committees that begin to take up how the production of goods and services could be democratized in any given sector, and how what is produced and the way it's produced could be changed. And by mounting cross-sector campaigns.

In my view, this approach is mistaken. It's not that union activists have no need for socialist analysis and politics. They do. Most of those at the forefront of recent struggles lack "not outrage, not militancy, but a more analytical and strategic awareness of the class issues and implications raised in struggle," as British socialist labour activist Sheila Cohen puts it in her new book *Ramparts of Resistance: How Workers Lost Their Power and How to Get it Back*. Socialist politics offers precisely this broader, deeper perspective. That's why it's tragic that organized and conscious socialism has almost no influence in the unions in Canada and Quebec.

But to say that what's needed in the unions right now is socialist politics puts the cart before the horse. How can socialism gain a presence? Cohen makes the crucial point that we need to begin by engaging with those issues and struggles workers have identified in the here and now. It is critical for strategies to be relevant to workplace activists, who are busy trying to fend off employer forays and encourage solidarity and action among their coworkers.

Gindin's sectoral committees idea is an example of the kind of strategy that is at best premature. How do such committees connect with workers' struggles today, and who would their members be? (For socialists, there's also the question of what kind of political strategy they would be part of. Gindin sees them as helping promote an alternative economic agenda that includes developing an independent Canadian economy. I don't see this as advancing the power of the working class to change society.)

The most promising approach for building a stronger union movement is to start from what Cohen calls "the existing terrain of worker struggle." Today, this terrain is usually small, defensive workplace fights—for example, to enforce a contract right, respond to racism, or protest a service cut—with occasional outbursts of strike action and protests against right-wing state policies.

Sadly some, who see the big picture and understand that the global capitalist system is the underlying cause of so many of the problems we face, act as if such small workplace fights are not important (I'm not accusing Gindin of this). But such fights matter enormously. They affect people's lives right now. They also play a major role in shaping the willingness and ability of workers to take on larger struggles. If you

Elected Positions and Staff Jobs

If we want to build rank-and-file unionism, our priority should be workplace activism, not trying to elect more left-wingers to full-time union positions and get more radicals into staff jobs. Without a mobilized base of militants to work with and be accountable to, activists elected to top positions are trapped. Staff must follow the direction laid down by top officials if they want to keep their jobs. Instead of changing the union, militants who get elected to full-time positions or take staff jobs are usually changed themselves. This doesn't mean that militants should *never* run for such positions or be staffers, but we need to be aware of the dangers and always ask the question, "Can you actually help build rank-and-file unionism in that position?"

and your co-workers can't win reinstatement for someone who's been fired, are you likely to believe the working class could transform society?

In Canada today, unions are a key feature of the terrain of workers' struggle. They are also quite contradictory. They are bureaucratic institutions ensnared in legal restrictions on what they can do (which *can* be defied, as the BC teachers' strike showed so well). They are also working-class movement organizations, the organizations that most workers are most likely to turn to when they want to take some kind of action to protect themselves or make a positive change.

The BC teachers' strike in 2005 is one of the few recent examples of an inspiring. large-scale union fightback.

Building from Below and Within

Unions are often more bureaucratic institutions than movement organizations. But that only underlines why it's important to "put the movement back into the movement." The top priority today is to foster what has sometimes been called "rank and file unionism." This means unionism rooted in the workplace, unionism that really involves workers organizing democratically, building solidarity and militant action.

The priority for union activists should be, as Cohen writes, the "strategic, conscious building of rank and file organisation and resistance." That means action by workers on issues affecting them everyday. Activists need to be leaders who identify their coworkers' concerns, suggest ways to address them (check out *The Troublemaker's Handbook 2* for lots of ideas) and help draw out their implications. Acting and making a difference in the workplace can build workers' confidence and expectations. It can help develop a workplace culture of solidarity.

In this soil, rank and file unionism can grow. When it does, it's often possible to build networks or caucuses of militants committed to this approach, capable of acting independently of official union structures and leadership bodies when necessary. This is an important task. So too is the unionization of unorganized workers, which needs to be pursued through a rank-and-file unionist strategy.

Another challenge is finding ways to bring together workers who belong to different unions, or who work for different employers or in different industries. Connecting workplace activists with community groups such as those organizing people on social assistance or fighting for the rights of non-union workers also needs to happen.

Such efforts have the potential to give birth to what are called social movement unions (SMUs): unions whose actions are guided by the strategic goal of building a broad movement of unions and community-based organizations for deep social change. SMUs put democratic membership control at the heart of their efforts. This is quite different from the bureaucratic mobilization approach of unions like the CAW and the Service Employees International Union, which is sometimes labeled SMU.

Right now in most unions SMU seems like a pipe dream. But the potential for it has been there in some recent struggles. The Solidarity Caucus—a BC grouping formed after the defeat of the brave 2004 strike of the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU; **see coverage in *New Socialist 47***)—put it this way in their founding statement: "Such a labour movement is not beyond our grasp ... We can see it in all those hospital workers and teachers and electricians and transit workers who stood up ... and all those longshoremen and city employees and millworkers and ferry workers who were ready to walk out and join in."

The key lesson of the powerful HEU and BC teachers' strikes is in what was missing from these struggles: organized networks of activists with a rank-and-file unionist approach who could argue against the official leaders for winning strategies and tactics.

The major labour-community mobilizations of the past decade created the potential for building such networks within and across unions. These mobilizations included the Days of Action, the protests in Quebec against the Charest government, the 2001-2005 fight-back in BC and the debates about how to move them forward. But even the more left-wing union leaderships have no interest in this kind of organizing. Other radicals have been uninterested or too few in number to take a step forward (the launch of the Solidarity Caucus in BC was a notable exception).

Important opportunities have been missed. But building rank-and-file unionism rooted in the workplace is still our best hope if we want to stop and reverse union retreat. If we fail, the decline of unions in the US shows us that we could be in for a decline in unions such as what has already been experienced in the US. ★

Facing the challenge of neoliberalism

Canadian unions need to change

By Herman Rosenfeld

Canadian unions face huge threats and pressures. The long-term effects of neoliberal restructuring that began in the late 1970s have reshaped today's economic environment, giving new power to employers to demand concessions. Whether the threatened outcome is a US corporate takeover, capital moving offshore, outsourcing or bankruptcy protection, the logic of capitalist restructuring weighs heavily on the minds of union members today. This is not to mention the assault on public sector trade union rights, through which governments have increasingly used legislation rather than bargaining to get people back to work..

Huge differences in wages, job tenure, security and working conditions continue to be a feature of working-class life. Precarious work is more prevalent, extending to workers in more secure and better paying jobs. Further down the ladder, those who survive by working longer hours and making other sacrifices blame those at the bottom, those who, stuck in low-wage, precarious jobs, feel little solidarity with the rest of the class. The reduction of social services and lack of collective experiences of common struggle have helped create a "disorganization" of the class. A growing resignation to the status quo has led workers to search instead for individual solutions.

Many of the previous successes of Canadian labour have been undermined, and the movement is vulnerable. But this is only part of the story. While capital aggressively dismantles what remains of the welfare state, labour has been unable and unwilling to recognize the depth of the crisis, the impossibility of resuscitating the postwar compromise, and the necessity of radicalizing its political outlook and organizing. Most unions have retreated to a position of defensiveness at best.

Workers and Competitiveness

The Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) broke away from its US affiliate in 1984 because it refused to accept concessions from the Big Three automakers. For years, it made substantial gains in difficult times. It also openly challenged the ideology of competitiveness, arguing the success of employers was a constraint, and never a goal for workers. The union looked to consolidate the independence, understanding and power of the workers, even when it was unable to make gains in the short run. In the long run, it hoped to push back marketplace constraints through political action—a strategy that worked for many years. Over the 1980s, 1990s and the early 2000s, the CAW organized a series of militant industrial actions, such as plant occupations, and pushed the political envelope.

In the past few years, however, especially in the auto sector, the CAW's challenges and militancy have all but disappeared. Despite some progressive forces, the union's inability and unwillingness to put forward an alternative has been painful to watch.

Although the union prevented takeaways in the face of declining market share of the employers in the last set of Big Three bargaining, it all but publicly renounced its willingness to oppose corporate restructuring. This came on the heels of its mass campaign for job creation in the auto sector that featured calls for government subsidies to leverage corporate investment, among other demands. While state subsidies for multinational investment are an unfortunate fact of life in today's world, mobilizing workers principally to demand subsidies for their employers—the wealthiest corporations in the world—undermines the union's independence and ideological strength.

When General Motors announced plans to close one of its Oshawa plants, there was no organized resistance. Soon afterward, in the wake of government announcements of subsidies, GM began to pressure the Oshawa local for concessions in order to secure major new investments. The resulting agreement included reductions in relief time, contracting out almost 400 custodial jobs and hiring temporary workers. Again, there was no public resistance campaign. In response to critics, the leadership embarrassingly claimed that times are tougher, and such "deals" (they never called them concessions of course) are necessary. Facing a united national and local leadership, members voted to accept the agreement.

Skirmishes Outside the Auto Sector

There have been some CAW struggles outside of the auto sector, including a drawn-out battle to defend jobs in a New Brunswick paper mill and a campaign to stop bilateral free trade agreements. But even there, the union has shied away from challenging employers. Instead, it called for "Fair Trade," which it defined as opening up foreign markets for goods manufactured by Canadian-based companies or US-owned employers with branch plants in Canada. Recent plans for a campaign to halt the loss of manufacturing jobs

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and public calls for a North American Auto Pact might create some openings for a positive move forward.

In steel, Canadian giant Stelco has been under bankruptcy protection with massive pension liabilities. Key locals of the United Steelworkers of America were locked in a complex struggle to protect their pensions and prevent concessions. They resisted pressure from the employer and courts, and have forced the Steelworkers' leadership to stick by them. Without an alternative vision and a strategy, however, the outcome remains in doubt. The Steelworkers also successfully defeated attempts by US transnational Goodyear Tire to impose major concessions after a bitter, cross-border strike. The anti-concessions work in Hamilton and efforts to make area councils centres of militancy has created some openings.

In the food and retail sector, things are worse. Wal-Mart, with 262 stores and 70,000 workers in Canada, announced the closure of the only North American location with a certified union, in Jonquière, Québec. And, facing pressure from Wal-Mart in 1993, the principal union in the food sector, the United Food and Commercial Workers, agreed to major concessions to Loblaws. The most recent collective agreement also contains provisions for multi-tier wages and benefits, as well as efforts to make workers pay for the competitive challenge of Wal-Mart.

Defending workers' rights in the air transport sector requires waging a political campaign to convince the public to support demands for re-regulating the industry and re-nationalizing Canada's flagship carrier, Air Canada. But none of the five unions put this forward. When it came to fighting concessions, this limited approach left no way of winning. In this context, the significance of a successful battle to defend defined-benefit pension plans led by the CAW and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) was lost in the restructuring of collective agreements and the sacrifice of other rights. Employers often remind union bargainers that the Air Canada experience shows *their* union can be "reasonable."

When unions accept the *legitimacy* of giving back previously won gains in the name of competitiveness, it signifies a fundamental shift in the terms of class struggle. They must clearly explain to their members the reasons for the defeat and point out factors that will aide in winning them back in the future when conditions change. Concessions can never be legitimated as a union goal.

The Public Sector

The federal public service bore the brunt of the brutal budget cuts in the 1990s. Increasingly, provincial governments are opting for Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) that maintain nominal public ownership, but cede actual control and management to the private sector. Municipal workers face the fallout from government amalgamations and restructuring, as well as new pressures to compete with private service providers and downloaded services. The federal Public Service Alliance, provincial public sector unions and CUPE—the principal public sector union at the municipal level—have led important struggles against concessions and privatization.

In British Columbia, the right-wing Campbell Liberals forced major wage cuts and outsourcing in hospitals. Although the union, a CUPE affiliate, and the British Columbia Federation of Labour won some minor limitations, the final takeaways were brutal. This led to widespread anger in the labour movement. Critics argued that accepting such setbacks would serve as a warning to reduce expectations across the country. Based upon the mass support for industrial action building across the province, they criticized the leadership for failing to recognize the important opening for inspiring and mobilizing others that was lost.

Last year, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation had more success building support from the labour movement and putting itself in a position to bargain in negotiations this spring. There clearly were lessons learned from the aborted health sector strike.

Public sector unions have maintained a firm stand against cutbacks, concessions and privatization. But saying "no" isn't enough: we must also argue for both increasing revenues to fund public services, and for a more democratic vision of public services.

The Big Picture

After key struggles in the late 1990s that could have moved unions beyond social democratic politics, the movement has fallen into a tepid reformism and corporatism. Unions now believe companies can carve out a competitiveness strategy that doesn't rely on lowering wages and working conditions, and is somehow "progressive."

With the election of the Harper Tories and the drift of

Reformism and Corporatism

Divisions: The labour movement has always had major political divisions. A decade ago, for instance, vibrant debates raged between those who argued in favour of worker "empowerment" and labour investment funds, and those who called for heightened class independence and political controls on capital. Today, squabbles over jurisdictional interests trump such debates. This is partly related to fierce competition for new members. But it has more to do with the lack of alternative perspectives in the movement and several key internal problems:

Organizing: Changes to the legal framework for organizing have become pro-employer in recent years. But fundamental problems lie within the movement itself. Organizing is seen too often as a way of increasing the membership of individual unions and not as a strategy to build the class as a whole. There is little interest in collectively building multi-union efforts for an organizing breakthrough in any sector.

Internal Democracy: There is little substantive debate over union policies in the major unions. Leaderships often predetermine the outcomes. In larger forums, such as conventions, controversial decisions are made behind the scenes. Aside from a handful of dissidents, the debates are often sterile.

Structure: Central control in powerful private sector unions allows them to coordinate bargaining strategies and organize unified political campaigns. That is their strength. However, it also prevents alternative perspectives from percolating up from the bottom and smothers potential challenges. Large public sector unions are so decentralized they lack the capacity to organize key debates, carryout focused campaigns or common collective bargaining approaches. Some groups within these unions have used their autonomy to wage creative challenges to employers. But others have *supported* employers in the face of the progressive policies of the elected central leadership.

Leadership: The present generation of Canadian union leaders are, for the most part, smart, dedicated unionists who have come from workplaces. They face challenges that are different and more complex than their predecessors. They often come out of a common political tradition, having fought and won significant gains in the past, engaging in some of the 1990s mass struggles and reformist political activities. But the current context cannot be addressed through traditional approaches. With the weakness of the left and the ebb of mass struggles, they have little impetus to entertain other approaches. Without any real sense of the possibility of challenging the logic of capital, they have become ambivalent about organizing the kind of collective resistance of earlier periods or leading new ones today.

the NDP to the opportunistic centre, politics has become confusing for unions. Some have drifted back toward the NDP. Even stalwart social democratic unions recognize the difficulties with this strategy. For others, the need to get rid of Harper has driven an obsession with electoral alliances. Others have focused on corporatist efforts to win subsidies for employers. Mass demonstrations and educational campaigns have given way to lobbying governments for reforms.

Time for a New Approach

The labour movement in Canada needs to recognize that the current era of employer aggressiveness is rooted in the present stage of capitalism. Labour should be in the forefront of the struggle for democratic control over capital. This would include struggling against deeper integration with US imperialism via NAFTA and military alliances. Inside workplaces, labour has to aggressively challenge lean production techniques and practices. Unions must argue for a different kind of economy and workplaces. This requires rebuilding the capacity to challenge management on the workplace floor, through various kinds of collective, direct action strategies. Unions have to renew the art of mobilizing the collective power of their members and learning through the experiences of confronting employers.

This would require that unions become places where an informed membership freely debates and influences decision -making. There needs to be an atmosphere of creativity and openness to new ideas and the racial and gender diversity of memberships. Organizing needs to become a central way of rebuilding class unity, bringing workers from low-paid, fast food or retail outlets into the ranks of organized labour. Unions need to recognize the growing sections of the working class in precarious work and in poverty. Crucial here are needs of immigrant workers, many whom are illegal and subject to the abuse of employers. Competitive organizing among unions needs to be replaced by coordinated strategies and priorities. Workers' Centres, campaigns for a living wage or other new forms of organization and mobilization are also means to reach out to new workers. Links should be built with social movements addressing the needs of working people in their communities, such as housing, education, health care and child care.

Fundamental is the need for alternative political movements that bring a socialist orientation to the struggles of working people. This will not come from within the union movement alone. The political radicalism that began to build in the 1990s in CUPE, CAW, CUPW and elsewhere was not sustainable without the existence of an organized socialist left. Unions are not capable of standing in as functional equivalents of parties. A political reference point challenging the system is a necessary counterpoint to union resignation at the possibilities of challenging neoliberalism. ★

She went on to organize

Interviews with women labour activists

New Socialist's **Sandra Sarner** heard from three women labour activists: In the following pages, **Cathy Austin**, **Lisa Descary** and **Katherine Nastovski** share their stories of the challenges encountered and the insights gained from their experiences in union work. We started off by asking each to tell us a little bit about herself.

Cathy Austin: I'm a 50 year-old union activist: first in a public service union, then after my job was eliminated, I went to the private sector and got a job as an auto worker. For the last 17 years I've been active in the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union. After holding a committee-person position for eight years in the assembly shop, I was un-elected. After a period of time, I served the local as a Trustee, Vice-President and, since June 2006, as President.

Lisa Descary: I'm a 41 year-old high school Math and Science teacher out here on the wet coast—Richmond, BC (a suburb of Vancouver). Like most West Coasters, I'm originally from back east—Toronto, in my case. I have been "staff rep" (the teacher equivalent of shop steward) at my present school almost since I started teaching there in 1992. I am quite active in my local of the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF), and I'm an active member of the BCTF left caucus. I'm also a single parent of a seven year-old little girl who has Asperger's, a form of high-functioning autism, and I am quite a workaholic both in my teaching and in my union activities, so I sometimes find it hard to fit everything in! Somehow, though, I do find time to sing with the Solidarity Notes Labour choir, which has become my main hobby in the last four or five years since I got divorced.

Katherine Nastovski: I'm a second year PhD student at York University in social and political thought. I'm a Vice-President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) local 3903 which includes Contract Faculty, Teaching Assistants and Graduate Assistants at York University. I am also chair of the CUPE Ontario International Solidarity Committee and a rep for Ontario on the CUPE National Global Justice Committee.

Experiences in Organizing

NS: Could you briefly describe a recent organizing campaign, drive or effort that you've been involved in.

Cathy: A few years ago, I was involved in an organizing drive at a nursing and retirement home. I was flabbergasted that of the 155 workers, there were five full-time workers. The workers were represented by a company-oriented union and, although they had stewards, they had not seen a copy of their actual contract for four to five years. Since the workers had approached us, we had to tell them we could not organize them till the open period. Due to this we had only a short time to do the drive. We were successful in winning the vote on the nursing home side but did not win the workers of the retirement home. I'm guessing this was due to the fact that the workers on the retirement home side did not deal with the work-load and speed-up issues that the nursing home side dealt with.

What put us over the top in winning the vote was the one-third of workers who were high school and college students. The company treated them as the lowest tier workers in many ways. One sister organizing with us had a daughter the same age as the students. She involved her daughter to approach students who she knew and then introduce them to her mom. This mom is a very special sister, very young-looking with tons of energy and smarts. She gained the students' trust. Also, we looked up all the students who had parents in the union. With so many part-time workers it made

The B.C. teachers' strike of 2005 showed the potential power of women workers.

this drive particularly difficult. Almost all sisters worked two and three jobs. Their time and energy was in limited supply—understandably so.

One big contradiction of these sisters was their desire to learn to represent themselves in the workplace—to negotiate, etc. But they wanted big guys in union coats to be right behind them for support. The other item that complicated this drive was that these women wanted to be part of a well-established local union in the town—one that has a wonderful and solid reputation in the community and has been here for over 60 years. They wanted the connection to that particular union local. But just as we were finishing the vote, the national union announced that they wanted them to go into a "health care local" that spans Southwestern Ontario. This was not what the sisters had in mind and they let the national rep know that they wanted to belong to the community local.

As organizers we tried to help them get what they wanted, but it was their own strength that pulled it off. Some of the arguments for not putting them into the community local were that they operated under a different labour code as health care workers and HILDA (Hospital Labour Disputes Arbitration Act which prohibits strikes and lockouts where collective bargaining involves hospital, nursing home, etc. employees). Without the right to strike, if a settlement cannot be reached, it is done through binding arbitration. The other union argued that they couldn't handle negotiations without the right to strike. They have done just fine however in negotiations.

Lisa: I have been involved in the BCTF for the last five years or so as a delegate to the BCTF Annual General Meeting (AGM) and a member of the left caucus of the BCTF, Teachers' Viewpoint (although TV is mostly a talk shop and an electoral machine for getting progressive candidates elected to the BCTF executive). I have also been the staff rep for my school for the last 13 years, which has meant that I have often ended up butting heads with the leadership of my local, the RTA (Richmond Teachers' Association). Ironically, while the BCTF is quite progressive, and is truly a social justice union, the RTA has the reputation of being one of the most conservative BCTF locals in the province. The RTA is more of a sectional, business union than a social justice union, but given that direction provided by the BCTF is more to the left, they have to accommodate this perspective to a limited extent. It's a real challenge being a progressive shop steward in a local like this one, I must say.

Recently, I have been active as part of a progressive group of four or five staff reps in Richmond who are trying to push the RTA in a more progressive direction. We have run for executive the past three years or so (unsuccessfully) and have spoken up at general meetings and monthly staff rep assemblies in favour of things like going to an all-out strike rather than work-to-rule in the BCTF job action of October 2005, and in favour of having BCTF members be able to vote on a deal before returning to work after a strike.

Katherine: From the fall of 2005 until August of this year, our committee was working to establish a network of international solidarity activists in Toronto. The idea was to bring labour and community activists together in the city who work on international solidarity to develop some coordinated projects and campaigns as a way of building stronger relationships, sharing resources and challenging the boundaries of our respective organizing strategies. Now, we are primarily working on implementing the resolution we passed at our convention last May calling for an education tour on Israeli apartheid. This resolution was a response to the call in 2005 from Palestinian civil society for the initiation of a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel. For more information about the call or our resolution visit www.cupe.on.ca or www.caiaweb.org.

As a sister in organizing, I think it is important to not let brothers in the drive "take over" certain aspects of the drive. If the group to be organized is comprised mostly of women, it is useful to have sisters organize them.

NS: What are some of the successes you've experienced in organizing in recent years? In general and in relation to women workers, also in relation to people of colour, immigrants and/or other minority groups.

Cathy: I'm afraid we live in a Southwestern Ontario rural-type city that has few people of colour and immigrants so I'm unable to comment on that. But I would have to say that organizing women seems to be getting easier. They know what they need and when they see what the union can offer them they are very courageous in fighting for it.

Lisa: Despite being unable to get elected to anything in the RTA, our little group of activists has been able to have some small impact. When a motion came to the BCTF AGM in the spring of 2005 to require a membership vote to return to work after a strike, three of us spoke on the motion and tried to sway individual delegates to support it. In the end, it passed, and I feel that the BCTF strike of Oct. 2005 would have achieved less than it did if our leader, Jinny Sims, hadn't been able to tell those she was negotiating with that she couldn't accept less, since the members then would vote the deal down.

As well, we have been able to push our local to become slightly more democratic. For example, the RTA leadership did not used to allow the vote counts to be reported out from elections of RTA executive members, despite this being the procedure in our constitution. After being questioned about this by members of our little group, they had to begin to follow their own policy.

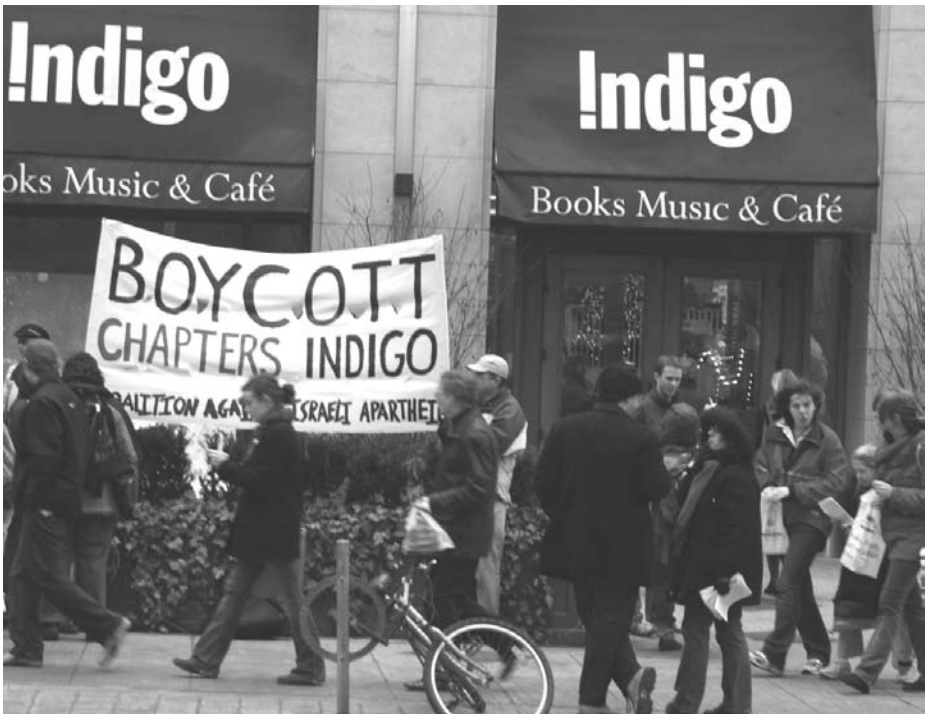

PHOTO: ROBERT J. ALLISON

Toronto, December 2006: The launch of the boycott campaign against Chapters-Indigo. See www.caiaweb.org

Most of the work that I end up doing, however, is that of educating the teachers in my school about union issues. Because of the vacuum of political ideas in this local, I find myself calling lunchtime meetings of my staff of about 45 teachers to talk with them about issues like our health and safety concerns (we have had a lot of trouble with our heating system —rooms at 10 degrees or 32 degrees C are not uncommon) or how to address the problems stemming from a lack of TOCs (Teachers On Call or substitute teachers). In the latter case, we had been asked with increasing frequency to give up our preparation time to "cover" classes for a colleague when that colleague was sick, since no TOCs were available, something that was almost unheard of in the past in BC. Unlike Ontario secondary teachers who have two preparation periods out of every eight, BC teachers have only one prep out of eight periods, so we are loathe to give it up. Since no direction on this was provided from our local leadership, other than requests for us to document it, our teachers voted to decline to cover classes unless specifically directed to do so by administration. Then the collective agreement specified that we were to do so, but this was meant to happen only in an emergency.

These discussions may sound rather petty, but I found that the basic ideas fundamental to successful trade unionism were present even in these simple discussions. In convincing people not to cover classes for free, I had to face arguments from people who thought that "we and admin are all in this together" or people who were worried that this would be detrimental to the students. Once we talked about it, many people were able to see that, in fact, administrators have a different focus. They have to watch the bottom line, despite the extra work it means for teachers. They were also able to see that students' interests are not served by making up for the cuts by "making do" and covering classes, as this only leads to being asked to make do with even less next time!

Katherine: An important success for us has been creating space to do international solidarity organizing within our union that incorporates and builds on work that is being done in the community. Besides education and organizing, we've passed a number of resolutions in solidarity with the objectives of international solidarity groups in the community. The resolution against Israeli apartheid has been the most profiled of these resolutions. What is particularly exciting about this resolution in terms of organizing in our union is the space it has mandated to do a province-wide education tour. We hope that this will be a way to organize other CUPE activists, particularly those outside of Toronto, with regards international solidarity more generally. While the resolution has meant focusing a lot of our energies on developing the tour, this organizing has simultaneously resulted in building stronger relationships within our union and with both other union and community activists outside CUPE.

Challenges in Organizing

NS: What are some of the problems, issues and questions you've encountered in your organizing? Again, in general and in relation to women and/or other groups, as relevant.

Cathy: There are a couple of things I noticed. One is not so much a problem as much as it is something to respect and take into consideration that is, part-time workers working several jobs. These women have unbelievably complicated schedules and limited energy. You cannot waste their time, energy and limited resources. As a sister in organizing, I think it is important to not let brothers in the drive "take over" certain aspects of the drive. If the group to be organized is comprised mostly of women, it is useful to have sisters organize them. The same is true for any group—as you know.

Also again, as sisters in the union, I believe it was incumbent upon us to sell the union but also to be as honest as possible. For example, when the women asked us if women had to struggle within the union to be heard, we were honest with them. We told them our union had made a lot of gains in this area but there was still lots of mountains to climb – but we would

climb them as sisters together. Another barrier, not co-operating between unions and local unions within the same union—protecting turf, egos, stuff like that.

Also, just an observation—not building power with workers, "taking care" of them instead of helping them to realize their own power, can be a barrier to both organizing and building a strong union. A question I think unions struggle with is whether the group of workers is "worth" organizing. Some of the lower income, more transient workplaces and other precarious work usually present higher demands to service. Personally though, because of these factors, it makes it more apparent that these workers need unions as much and even more than most workers. If unions can't step up to this, then what are the principals of that union saying? I do realize though that there is a balance to be struck. But, by organizing and doing a good job of servicing the needs of these workers, it helps to solve the ever-growing divide and isolation of unionized workers and non-unionized workers.

Lisa: One question that has come up in the past few years is that of which tactics to use in attempting to "reform" our local. Some of my colleagues have commented that we would have been better off running for executive as individuals, keeping a low profile until we were elected, and then implementing what changes we could "from above." We didn't do that; instead, we ran a slate, and attempted to put forward a platform that argued for more participatory democracy in the local, along with better communication with members and more vigorous enforcement of the contract. We tried hard to keep from running a negative campaign, put in hours and hours producing and distributing a campaign leaflet, all to get exactly the same percentage of the vote as we had the previous year when we didn't campaign.

An important success for us has been creating space to do international solidarity organizing within our union that incorporates and builds on work that is being done in the community.

After years of running for RTA executive and not being able to even be elected for a lowly member-at-large position, some of us are a bit demoralized. I keep arguing that there is no point in getting elected by a membership that isn't really behind the sort of reforms we wish to put through. We need to do the grassroots education first. It's just hard to do any educating when those on the executive have access to all the resources and chair all the meetings. I also wonder if teachers are victims of being overworked and therefore are too tired to come to union meetings and to engage in real democracy—although when we voted to end the strike, we certainly had the closest to 100 percent attendance at our local meeting as I've ever seen.

Katherine: There were a number of issues that arose in our work organizing the international solidarity network. The most prominent issues surround the possibilities and limitations of coordinating between community organizations and unions given the shaky context. This includes trust issues on the side of many community activists when working with union activists because of experiences of co-option/appropriation, etc. and the paternalistic attitude of some union activists and bodies. At the same time, there is also somewhat limited interest on the side of some community activists with regards to organizing rank and file workers. Some of these issues are related to the disequilibrium with respect to resources and some from having different organizing cultures. Internally, we are now primarily facing attempts at suppression and containment particularly by our national union in opposition to our resolution on Israeli apartheid.

Organizing women seems to be getting easier. They know what they need and when they see what the union can offer them they are very courageous in fighting for it.

NS: Is organizing today different from what you've experienced or heard about from 10 to 20 years ago, and if so, in what ways?

Cathy: I was not involved 20 years ago. But if I had to guess, the trend I've seen in the past 10 years is the increase in part-time work, temporary work, temporary workers, two-tier wages, contract work, lower union density and—the biggie—worker insecurity.

Lisa: Certainly, it is more difficult than in the days when unions struck for and won double-digit pay increases. A teacher on the Teachers' Viewpoint listserv who lives in a Northern BC resource town commented that he couldn't believe that we were voting to accept a deal that offered around 15 percent over five years, when in the past, they'd struck and won increases of the same amount in ONE year. Depressing. Many people have accepted the notion that there just isn't enough money to go around, and that to ask for a wage that keeps up with inflation is unrealistic.

Katherine: It seems that there is generally less and more fragmented activity and fewer numbers of activists than 10 years ago. As a student very new to activism 10 years ago, I can't comment on the union context at that time. The Metro Network for Social Justice (since disbanded) did seem to provide a centre and a means to more easily link up with others and build more dynamic coordinated actions. ★

WORTH CHECKING OUT

In this issue, we introduce a new column of mini-reviews by NS members and supporters. On this page, you will find suggestions for good reading, listening and watching. This time, we present recommendations for three books.

Stark Portrayal of Class War

The Iron Heel
by Jack London
Toronto: Penguin Classics, 2006

For readers like me this is as close to fiction as it gets. A stark portrayal of oligarchy, class war and revolution, Jack London wrote *The Iron Heel* in 1908. He has been widely credited with predicting the growth of government surveillance, centralization of power and the emergence of fascism. The story is written in a similar style as Upton Sinclair's *The Flivver King*, his account of the rise of the Ford Motor Company that was used by so many early UAW activists in organizing efforts. However, London is a more enjoyable read because the story is both broad and much more theoretically consistent. Penguin classics republished the book last year with a great critical intro (better left to the end) by University of Maryland English professor Jonathan Auerbach.

Reviewed by Euan Gibb, Activist in CAW Local 707

Graphic from the cover of *The Iron Heel*.

The Growing Brutality of Israeli Civil Life

Toward an Open Tomb: the Crisis of Israeli Society
By Michel Warschawski
New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004

Although published in 2004, this book is as relevant today as it was three years ago. Written in an easily accessible, sometimes personal, style, it focuses on the deterioration of Israeli civil life as a consequence of the brutal policies of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

In a short 100 pages, Warschawski documents the increase in atrocities since 2000 and the breakdown of the Oslo peace process. He provides evidence of the intentions of top Israeli leaders to take over all of historic Palestine at the expense of the rights and lives of Palestinians in the occupied territories and inside Israel.

As the brutality of the Israeli military has increased in the past few years, it has been accompanied by an increase in rudeness, violence, and racism in daily life inside Israel, all of which Warschawski illustrates with examples and explains with clear analysis. As one visitor that he quotes observes, this "society is sick."

In attempting to dehumanize the Palestinians, Israelis have also become dehumanized. Domestic crimes are on the rise. Assaults and murders are up 20 percent, especially among youth whose only role models are soldiers and fanatical settlers. Racism is on the rise and every day brings new measures curtailing the rights and freedoms of Israel's Arab citizens. Police and security personnel have become more aggressive as respect for the rule of law deteriorates. School courses on peace and democracy have been cancelled and replaced with a greater emphasis on Zionism and the Bible. Left and liberal university professors fear for their jobs. The limited democracy that existed is being eroded.

Warschawski believes that these trends will ultimately lead to the destruction of Israeli society although he doesn't explain how this could play out. Nevertheless, it is an interesting perspective on the Israel-Palestine conflict and one not often heard.

Reviewed by Sandra Sarner Editor of New Socialist.

Ideas Fundamental to Democracy

The Social Contract
By Jean-Jacques Rousseau
Free online at http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/rousseau/social-contract/index.htm

Peppered with searing phrases ("man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains", "no citizen should be wealthy enough to buy another, nor poor enough to be forced to sell himself", "the general will must come from all and apply to all"), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* is an eloquent defense of social power written back in 1762. The author describes the contradiction between political passivity and participation, associating this as one between the "prince," "government" and "state" versus "sovereign," "body politic" and "general will." This contradiction is resolved only when everyone is committed to the active and equal participation of all in the decisions that affect them. In this book, *New Socialist* readers will find ideas that are fundamental to any struggle for a more democratic life.

Reviewed by Neil Braganza Member of the NSG in Toronto.

BUSINESS UNIONISM FROM THE INSIDE

The contradictions facing young radicals in union staff jobs

Recently, *New Socialist*'s **Jeff R. Webber** interviewed **Katherine G.** about the politics behind recruiting young radicals into union staff jobs, the implications for working class politics and alternatives for building workers' power.

JRW: Would you tell us a bit about your union staff position and why you decided to take the job?

KG: I took a job as a union organizer with the Service Employees' International Union (SEIU), local 1, which is the healthcare local for all of Ontario, over 40,000 members.

I was a University of Toronto (U of T) student and I was active in a UNITE-HERE campaign to unionize Sodexho food service workers at U of T. [UNITE (formerly the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees) and HERE (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union) joined together in 2004 to form UNITE-HERE.] That was where I was first exposed to union organizing. Since I have socialist politics, I wanted to get more involved. I wasn't a union member, so being a union organizer seemed like the easiest way to do that.

My decision was based on both political and practical factors. I had no decent job prospects and the union was offering $40,000 per year plus a car allowance. Also, there were romantic notions about organizing people into unions. Some of that was on my part but also it's a tactic to get young progressives to work really long hours under stressful conditions. It's presented as revolutionary, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

JRW: What was your experience as a staffer once you had the job?

KG: It was terrible in one way and, in another way, it was really positive because I learned so many things. I got to see what business-unionism is like from the inside—to hear the union president and staff say things and strategize in ways they wouldn't admit to members. I got to be active with the staff union—the organizers and reps had their own union. That taught me the bulk of the really interesting stuff—about how to be an activist in your union as a member.

There was so much fear bred into the union staffers—fear about getting involved in the staff union, of losing your job, of losing your next organizing campaign, or of your boss finding out that you were voicing criticisms. That really took its toll on me, especially because some of us were trying to counter it to create solidarity at work.

I've heard so many stories about people having much worse experiences as organizers, especially in the States. I was hired at a time when SEIU were embracing the US model of aggressively organizing new workers.

It was interesting that, according to this new model, you presented the union as radically democratic and rooted in the workplace. So the holy motto when talking to workers was: "The union is not a third party in the workplace, YOU ARE THE UNION." Unfortunately, this was contradictory to the way campaigns—much less the union as a whole—were run.

The new way of organizing was based on recruiting young radicals off university campuses, telling them this was revolutionary work, and then working them into the ground for six months to two years. The union organizers did the vast majority of the work on a union-izing campaign—not the folks in the workplace targeted for unionization. The majority of organizers, especially those from the US, considered themselves revolutionaries or socialists. It was obvious that they had a vague or misguided concept of what that meant and/or couldn't rationally relate this to their organizing work. I saw this as evidence of the current weakness of the radical left in North America—that we have no way of connecting to young people with progressive ideas and, more importantly, cannot offer them a meaningful project to be involved in.

JRW: Did your job allow you to help any workers become more self-reliant, confident, workplace activists?

KG: I don't want to play down the effect that being involved in a union drive can have on people. You'd hear some pretty surprising stories about how a successful campaign can transform people's confidence and change their lives. However, I didn't see anyone come out as a self-reliant workplace activist. Under the business-unionism model, an organizing campaign is based on getting people to sign cards and then turning them out to win the vote. The organizers oversaw

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Katherine G. worked as a union organizer for Service Employees International Union Local 1 for 7 months. She is currently taking a paramedic program at a community college and hopes to be active in the union once employed. Jeffery R. Webber is an editor of *New Socialist*. Thanks to Sebastian Lamb for helpful suggestions in formulating questions.

The American Federation of Labor's Union Summer is on the cutting edge in NorthAmerica in co-opting young university-based radicals to become union organizers.

everything. We alone planned the details and timing of the campaign. None of the workers were to be trusted. The highest level of involvement for a worker would be to convince co-workers to sign union cards and come to the vote.

Also sorely missing was political education on issues like why there are unions, or what is solidarity, or the history of the working class movement. Everything became reduced to, "You're having problems at work. Sign this card." At the end of the day it was about getting the largest numbers of new members in the shortest time possible within a tight budget. There was no space for radical organizing.

JRW: What wasn't democratic or militant about this kind of unionism?

KG: They way the union was set up. Members had no input into the direction. The president and the staffers (not ones like me) ran the union. There was a lot of rivalry between unions—you got the sense that SEIU's biggest enemy was another union rather than employers or the state. SEIU was constantly in competition with CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) and CAW (Canadian Auto Workers) since those unions were also organizing health care workers. The absence of working class solidarity was really sad. At the same time, the government was introducing bills to privatize more deeply in the health care sector. The health care unions would enter into coalitions to fight this and inevitably one of the big players would walk away from the table because the president's ego was too big.

A lot of the gains were made by taking employers to court, rather than mobilizing workers. In the seven months I worked there, never did I hear any talk of striking or workplace actions.

And I can't tell you the number of rallies I attended with other staffers (during work time), fully decked out is SEIU gear. I quickly realized that actual union members weren't brought to these—we stood in for them.

JRW: What did you learn from the experience, personally and politically?

KG: My involvement in the staff union made me want to continue being active in the union movement as a member, not as a professional organizer. The experience pushed me to learn more about the history of radical unionism, and how socialism is connected to workplace activism. I knew the union form I was seeing wasn't going to change the social relations of capitalism, so I wanted to find out what type of workers' organizations had done that in the past and what other socialists thought we should be doing to help rebuild those organizations.

I saw in practice ideas I had only encountered theoretically. The organizers had a serious health and safety concern—we were being sent out alone to cold call on workers at their houses to talk about joining the union. Nobody knows where you are; you're knocking on doors, trying to get into people's homes and you haven't the slightest clue what you're walking into. Half of the homes are not even the people that work at a given facility. Many people don't like unions. There were numerous incidents where organizers were threatened or even injured, so the organizers in our department took on the issue. We demanded to be sent out in pairs when cold calling on workers at their homes, but the employer refused. Our union did the research but there was no legal avenue of winning. I saw that the law wasn't designed to protect or empower workers—it was designed to protect capital's right to exploitation. Unions that played within the legally sanctioned parameters couldn't address the pressing issues of workers.

We organized a petition which all of our coworkers signed—it was to be used as leverage at the bargaining table. More importantly it was an organizing tool to build solidarity and escalate workplace action. In those short seven months, I

realized how much effort and time it would take to really start turning around our working conditions. It wasn't just about mobilizing the 50 members within our workplace; we had to branch out to union staffers at other unions.

The next obvious step would be to connect to a vibrant, broad, militant and democratic workers' movement. I really started feeling how limited our work was if the latter was missing. Workers have to be organized on a large scale to tip the balance in their favour – and that would require a drastic growth in consciousness.

JRW: What would you say to young left activists who are considering becoming union staffers?

KG: There's no easy answer to that question. I saw young people turn anti-union as a result of what they experienced as organizers—both those who were apparently socialists and those who had been members of SEIU in their workplace. It's understandable how that can happen if you lack the political understanding to contextualize business unionism and aren't connected to a project of building rank-and-file power.

What can you say to people when you can't offer them a collective alternative? If there was an organized, rank-and-file strategy in Canada, I would tell young people to get involved in that—but there isn't one. In the States, Solidarity [American socialist group] is getting a project off the ground where young people are getting union jobs and building rank-and-file strength in their workplaces. It offers a collective alternative of building union strength rather than doing the footwork of a bureaucratic union.

When I was at SEIU, some of us organizers went to a *Labor Notes* conference in Detroit [conference bringing together rank-and-file projects from the U.S and also from Latin America and Canada]. An older union activist expressed her disagreement with professional organizer positions: "When I was your age, I became a nurse because I wanted to be active in the union. I was a rank-and-file member in a union. That's how we organized." I think it's up to socialist groups and like-minded activists to figure out some kind of strategy to begin building a project rooted in workplaces. Considering that we think workers are the only ones with the power to radically transform society, you'd think we would try to connect with people at the workplace.

Under the business-unionism model, an organizing campaign is based on getting people to sign cards and then turning them out to win the vote ... The highest level of involvement for a worker would be to convince co-workers to sign union cards and come to the vote.

JRW: From your experiences, what kind of vision of radical unionism did you come away with? What would real workers' power look like?

KG: It would be democratic, militant organizing that is both shopfloor oriented and forms alliances with other workplaces and community groups. The most effective way of making gains is for workers to identify their most pressing issues and then to take workplace actions to address them. Actions can vary from signing a petition to walking off the job—that depends on the level of organizing. Democratic means that workers themselves have to be actively involved in conceptualizing and carrying out these actions. This is how people realize the power that is in their own hands and learn how to use it. There also has to be a connection of workplace activism to broader organizing—both to other workers and to communities. No one workplace can make major gains alone. The May Day 2006 immigrant rights demonstrations in the US is a perfect example of a shopfloor issue that was effectively addressed en masse.

Sooner or later this type of strategy brings you into confrontation with the union apparatus which seeks to dampen militant democratic action and reinstate its privileged position of being the only legitimate channel of improving workplace conditions. It's easy to fall into the trap of denouncing the union but that becomes a no-win situation. The key is to organize to confront the employer and let the union try to play catch up. Timing is a key strategy in workplace activism—you can't move faster than the experience of others allows for.

JRW: What would your suggestions be to people who want to build a fighting, democratic union movement?

KG: If you want to be a union activist, find a workplace where there has already been some successful militant organizing—and get yourself a job there. Or in a workplace where you know that radical activists are already organizing. Obviously pick a job you can do in the long term, otherwise you won't last long enough to really be involved in the union. Once you're in the workplace, try to connect with people who have similar views and organize together. You also have to build projects with people doing rank-and-file organizing in other workplaces. I know there are folks doing that activism in Canada but because there's no joint project it's hard to find out who they are or what they're active in.

At the same time as I argue for this, I realize that, unless we collectivize our rank-and-file activism, we are extremely limited in what can be achieved. Perhaps it will take a rise in the level of struggle before such a project becomes truly needed and viable here in the Canadian state.★

The perils of professional activism

This article is based on an interview and conversation with **Seth Clarke**. Seth has been a socialist activist for many years. He works in the social service sector in Toronto, doing anti-poverty and housing advocacy. All quotations are Seth's words.

"If you don't focus on your base, you don't increase your capacity to build next time. If there's a mantra, that's the mantra."

BY SANDRA SARNER WITH SETH CLARKE

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty uses a variety of tactics, including direct action, to push for affordable housing.

This is a key lesson for all political activists and one that has particular relevance for professional activists, those who are fortunate—or unfortunate—enough to find paid employment working for progressive social change. Some are union organizers and staffers. Others work for community groups or social service agencies doing anti-poverty, housing and immigration advocacy. The focus here is on the latter group, with some comparisons to union staff where appropriate.

At the heart of professional political activism, there are deep contradictions. Sometimes useful organizing can come out of the social service sector. But it can also have a negative effect on the very grassroots organizing it initiates. This article is an attempt to tease out those contradictions.

Among professional activist organizations, some are community advocacy groups that start out as coalitions. The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC) is an example. TDRC was formed in the 1990s around a call to declare homelessness a national disaster. Initially an all-volunteer group, in recent years TDRC has acquired enough funding to hire some professional staff.

Other social justice-oriented social service organizations, including some community legal clinics, are supported through government and charitable foundation funding and in some cases are mandated to do advocacy for individuals. The problems and needs of low-income clients —often immigrants and/or people of colour— frequently leads workers in this sector to take on broader political organizing in an attempt to win much-needed reforms.

In fact, such organizations often owe their existence to earlier struggles. Many were formed in the 1960s and early 1970s, the last period when our side was consistently fighting. Today, it is often progressive people who are drawn to this work. However, being employed in this sector can, and often does, have a conservatizing effect on workers.

Conservatizing Tendencies

There are a number of factors playing into this conservatizing tendency.

One is the nature of the work itself. "If a large chunk of your day-to-day work is trying to help people who are struggling to access services, you develop relationships with those people. You become aware of how vulnerable they are and you find yourself compensating."

Another source of hesitancy and conservatism is tied to a key debate around how best to do advocacy. "Do you work for someone, on their behalf, or do you try to support the person to self-advocate for themselves. That's a key space where there's a cut-off, in terms of what people think is politically possible or useful. People who are more likely to work for someone, will likely have a more conservative outlook on what's possible, and that gets in the way of working with people to self-represent." Workers who don't see the value in encouraging their clients to act for themselves will be more reluctant to encourage grassroots activism as a way to win gains. Their connection to the base is as a provider or helper rather than an ally.

Funding issues also play a big role in determining the approach taken by professional activists. The organization itself is often under clear restraints built right into its funding conditions. Social service organizations generally receive most of their funding from municipal or provincial governments and/or charitable organization like the United Way and, in Ontario, Trillium, which also have ties to government.

In Ontario, funding restrictions increased noticeably after the 1995 election of Mike Harris' Conservatives. Some organizations found themselves forced to remove the term "advocacy" from their funding proposals or risk losing govern-

Sandra Sarner is an editor of New Socialist.

ment funding. Others backed away from militant actions, like the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty's Queen's Park rally on June 15, 2000, for fear of losing funding.

Funding pressures conservatize some groups more than others and also "can create a space for people to choose to conservatize organizations."

The financial implications of decisions about whether or how to organize can act as a brake on militancy in the union sector as well. It is not unusual for a union to decline to organize a small workplace because the money spent would not be recouped by the dues base gained. However, there are also important differences between unions and community agencies in terms of how financial matters impact on decision-making. Unions are funded by members' dues, giving them more potential for independence. Most social service organizations, on the other hand, are funded by governments and/or charities.

It's not that there isn't some potential for making political gains through the advocacy social service sector. But it is important to understand this in light of the limitations as well. "It isn't a special place that has a measurable degree of potential greater than other sectors. Many people who work in the sector like to think of it that way, but to some degree it is just another part of the system, the status quo. It has a degree of independence but also, at the same time, it's not particularly independent."

In this way, there are similarities again with the union sector. The contradictions stem from the fact that both sectors are in opposition to, as well as part of, the capitalist system. They play a role in attempting to win gains from the capitalist class and improve the lives of working people and the poor.

But because they have won a certain legitimacy and status within the capitalist social system itself—mostly through earlier struggles—they tend to shy away from, and often outright oppose, militant grassroots actions. This type of activism —wildcat strikes, strong pickets, powerful demonstrations, etc.—could lead to legal and/or financial problems. Unions can face huge fines or lawsuits for violating contracts. Union leaders can face jail time for breaking the law. Social service organizations can lose funding, which would force them to cut back on services or even close down entirely.

CSN ARCHIVES

First day of the 1972 Quebec Common Front strike: radical tactics made possible by mass solidarity and public sympathy.

Class Perspective

From a broad, class-analysis perspective, these risks are sometimes worth taking. Ultimately, it is only through engaging in movement-building activities that our side can gain the strength and confidence to force the ruling class to back down. For example, during the 1972 Quebec Common Front strike, in which over 200,000 public sector workers walked off the job and paralyzed the province, the government responded by jailing the three leaders of the union federations involved when they refused to order the strikers back to work. But because of the strength of the movement and mass public sympathy, the government was forced to release the leaders within days and no charges were laid.

Of course, when to push forward with militant actions and when to back down are tactical decisions that must be weighed with a view to the strength of our side at the time. Unfortunately, in the current political climate, most unions and community advocacy groups are too cautious to take even small steps towards rebuilding a serious movement for radical change. Instead of tactics and efforts based on evaluating and building active involvement and grassroots leadership, too often we find an urgent push to win reforms on behalf of sections of the population who are most acutely affected by the injustice of capitalism.

Organizations have an inherent tendency to protect their own existence. It is extremely difficult for even the most dedicated activist to challenge that tendency. "It's not about the individual. It's about the structure and the work people are involved in. The pressure on staffers to act in certain ways, to focus on winnable moments and to work with each other as change agents with only occasional meaningful reference to a core constituency of affected people can't be underestimated."

"A social service advocacy group can play a role in developing, administering, and to some degree winning (but not by itself) certain reforms. Or more, accurately in recent times, it is occasionally able to put a roadblock in our retreat. But too often the approach taken to winning these gains leads to the deflation of the movement itself."

At the beginning, there is often "a real honest and energized attempt to get grassroots participation, to make sure the people directly affected are involved. I've seen this time and time again. The situation generally starts off quite well with people talking about the need for coalitions to be democratic and led by the grassroots. There will be meetings

organized in different parts of the city, demonstrations, educational work, all the elements in building the coalition and having people feel they can actively engage in it. But, if you're a professional activist, you have way more time for these things than, say, a low-income person surviving on welfare, or someone doing three jobs as a single parent. For the professional activist, urgency can set in. A tension arises between getting things done or taking the longer route of working to develop the grassroots participation of non-professionals.

"So professional activists often end up getting sucked in to working with politicians and other professionals. Perhaps you find a sympathetic politician and start focusing on that as a way to make a small gain. This can be the worst thing that can happen to an embryonic grassroots movement. There is something really sweet in getting a reform, even if it's a very small reform, so people go for that, rather than working on building the base. You're trying to get results with the strength of your argument rather than by being strong.

"A big difficulty in anti-poverty and social justice-type work is the tendency for professional activists to substitute themselves for the people they're trying

At the heart of professional political activism, there are deep contradictions

to help. And this can also lead them to lose their sense of the potential people have to figure things out for themselves, to go through a process where they can build confidence to self-organize and self-advocate. People need to feel like a campaign belongs to them. The moment you're no longer engaging with the groups of people most affected, working with people to move forward as a group, you will lose momentum.

Effective Building

"Time never stands still. In building coalitions, building movements, things are never static. They are either growing or they are waning. There are moments when potentials open up. We're trying to build towards those moments when you can develop some sustainable momentum. One of the things that defines the current period is the difficulty in building momentum, so it's more important than ever that we pay attention to the base.

"To build a winning movement or coalition, it's important to give people a variety of different ways of expressing themselves. For some people, that might be showing up and talking to their city counselor. For others, it might be writing a letter, or direct action, or education work, or talking to community organizations and churches. We tend, in both professional and non-professional activism, to be not so good at giving people lots of spaces to plug in. I'm more and more convinced that that's essential. A broad-based movement that has the ability to affect the public mood around an issue needs a whole series of tactics, all of which are valid and all of which need energy and support to move forward."

There are a number of general points to keep in mind when thinking about professional activism in today's conservative political climate. In contrast to times with higher levels of struggle, "people today find themselves more detached from the movements and drawing lines in the sand rather than moving forward. This way of working means that, when our side does turn and we're moving forward, people doing that kind of work, particularly when their focus is on lobbying and trying to 'gain the ear of politicians' are challenged and are likely to try to conservatize or speak for emerging movements on our side.

"This is one of my big issues with professional activism. There is a danger that the mode of operation will be an impediment to our side when the situation changes and there are opportunities to move forward and make real gains.

"Of course, there are many valuable lessons to take from our own recent history of resistance and we will need to take the best elements of those into future struggles. But there will also be a need to create new organizations. And ultimately to embrace new expressions of radical political activity. The capitalist class does not grant reforms because of

Funding issues play a big role in determining the approach taken by professional activists.

the strength of our reasoned argument. They are forced to concede through an assessment of the risk of a reduction in their wealth, power and privilege. Our working and living conditions are defined by the competitive profit-based production requirements of capital. Our organizing tactics and development must always adapt to the situation we find ourselves in as a class.

"In developing campaigns and coalitions, we need to think about how best to move a tactic forward in a way that also focuses on further developing the strength of progressive politics at the base level and its ability to self-organize and self-represent. That's the key to how you're going to grow and develop a sustainable movement. By sustainable, I don't mean 20 to 30 years, because life under capitalism is just not like that, but sustainable for long enough to develop a critical mass of support that can make the other side flinch. When these moments occur, they can forge an increased level of confidence and a renewed willingness to fight for more overt political demands on our side. The ideal would be to work with that in mind, and to avoid working with a focus on winning reforms from above through relationship building with politicians and supposedly progressive bureaucrats."★

To steal a mountain

The theft and destruction of sacred sites on SPAET Mountain

by Adam Barker

For centuries, colonial forces have tried to pry land away from indigenous peoples and communities, in an effort to secure a political and economic base for the Canadian state. Rarely, though, has one specific place been as quickly and completely usurped as SPAET Mountain (commonly called Skirt Mountain) has been in the past year. How is it possible to steal a mountain? If recent events are any indication, the theft of a place, even a sacred place, is all too easy. All that is required is ruthless and well funded corporate interests, complacent government, and betrayal of a community by their own leaders.

SPAET Mountain, like much of the Victoria, BC Capital Region District (CRD), is being heavily and aggressively developed, consistent with the upper-class, condo-centric development taking place all over southern Vancouver Island. Long before Victoria existed, the Coast Salish people regarded this mountain, and a large, water-filled cave as sacred sites. Now, despite the best efforts of many indigenous community members, the cave has been nearly completely destroyed, and the mountain will soon play host to a brand-new, ultra-exclusive community for the wealthy. The story of how this occurred is frighteningly short.

The Victoria region was one of the first to be actively and permanently colonized on the west coast of Canada. When James Douglas founded Fort Victoria and signed what have become known as the Douglas Treaties with the local Coast Salish communities in the 1800s, the area was heavily populated by indigenous nations and SPAET Mountain was one of several sacred sites central to the cultural life of the Salish people. Less than two hundred years later, the local communities have been geographically fractured, scattered through a half dozen disconnected reserves that roughly correspond with traditional fishing sites. As is all too common in Canada, the Douglas Treaties were and are regarded by the local peoples as peace and friendship agreements. However, for the Crown, they constitute legal justification for the appropriation of indigenous lands, including SPAET Mountain, which boasted no permanent settlement in no small part due to the sacred nature of the place. Over time, because of the relative inaccessibility of the cave, as well as an increase in nearby development, the cave became less frequently used; however, its importance was not forgotten.

A golf course at Bear Mountain.

In 2001, the Bear Mountain Corporation headed by Len Barrie purchased title to the land from the Tsartlip Band Council (the "official" government of one of the many Salish bands in the area). Over the next five years, the development of the upscale golf course community proceeded at a slow but relentless pace, heedless of barriers to development on SPAET: the Douglas Treaties have never been clarified to the satisfaction of the local Salish communities; the band councils are often criticised for not representing the people; and the mountain was used by and sacred to all of the area peoples, not just those of the Tsartlip band. Not surprisingly, some within the Songhees community, another local reserve, objected, citing the cave as a site of particular importance. Led by vocal community member Cheryl Bryce, the Songhees set about trying to put a stop to the development of their sacred land. Numerous meetings with Len Barrie and the development group resulted only in an increasingly acrimonious and frustrating atmosphere. Barrie continued to state that if the Songhees would show the sacred sites to him, the sites would be protected. However Barrie also declared in press conference that: first, no cave exists; second, if the cave did exist, it would be turned into a tourist attraction and the water pumped out for the golf course; third, on his property, he will blow up or bulldoze whatever he likes.

Bryce continued her attempts to rally community support through letters and meetings, as well as pursue any possible options through government protection, but the government has stood firmly behind Bear Mountain Corporation on this issue. Justine Batten, director of the archaeology branch of the BC Ministry of Tourism, Sports and the Arts, has maintained in private e-mails and public interviews that the area was surrendered under the Douglas Treaty, and neither the Songhees nor any other band has

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any claim over it. When the cave was eventually "discovered" by the developers, Batten pointed to a lack of evidence of continuous use or habitation in order to exempt the cave from the protection of the Heritage Conservation Act. In a classic washing-of-hands, Batten told a business publication in October 2006, that it is not the responsibility of the Ministry to police violations of the act, essentially giving Barrie and the Bear Mountain developers carte blanche.

Local government provided no help. The dispute should have fallen at least partially under the jurisdiction of the CRD, but Victoria mayor and CRD Chair Allan Lowe worked as an architect for Bear Mountain Corp., and frequently excused himself from discussions around SPAET Mountain, thus leaving the CRD effectively leaderless and immobile on the issue. In the ultimate irony, the developers teamed with a cultural and environmental assessment team from the provincial government to conduct a full "assessment" of the sacred cave—which entailed the removal of the entire roof of the cave, turning it into essentially an open, water-filled pit. The water was promptly pumped out, and the cave filled with tires and tree stumps, refuse from the clear cut occurring on the ridge above.

Bryce rallied a small group of supporters in the dawn hours of November 17, 2006, to make good on the rumblings of "blockade" that had been heard for the past year. Although too small a group to fully occupy the site, they were able to shut down work around the cave for several days and appeared on the front page of the Victoria daily newspaper. Despite threatening moves made by some of the development crew, the group stayed put. Barrie remained quiet, refusing to speak to the media. Eventually, negotiations began between representatives of the local band councils, the Canadian government, and the developers. However, meetings were largely shrouded in mystery; many in the indigenous communities did not even know they were taking place. As information from the discussions slowly filtered out, it became apparent that

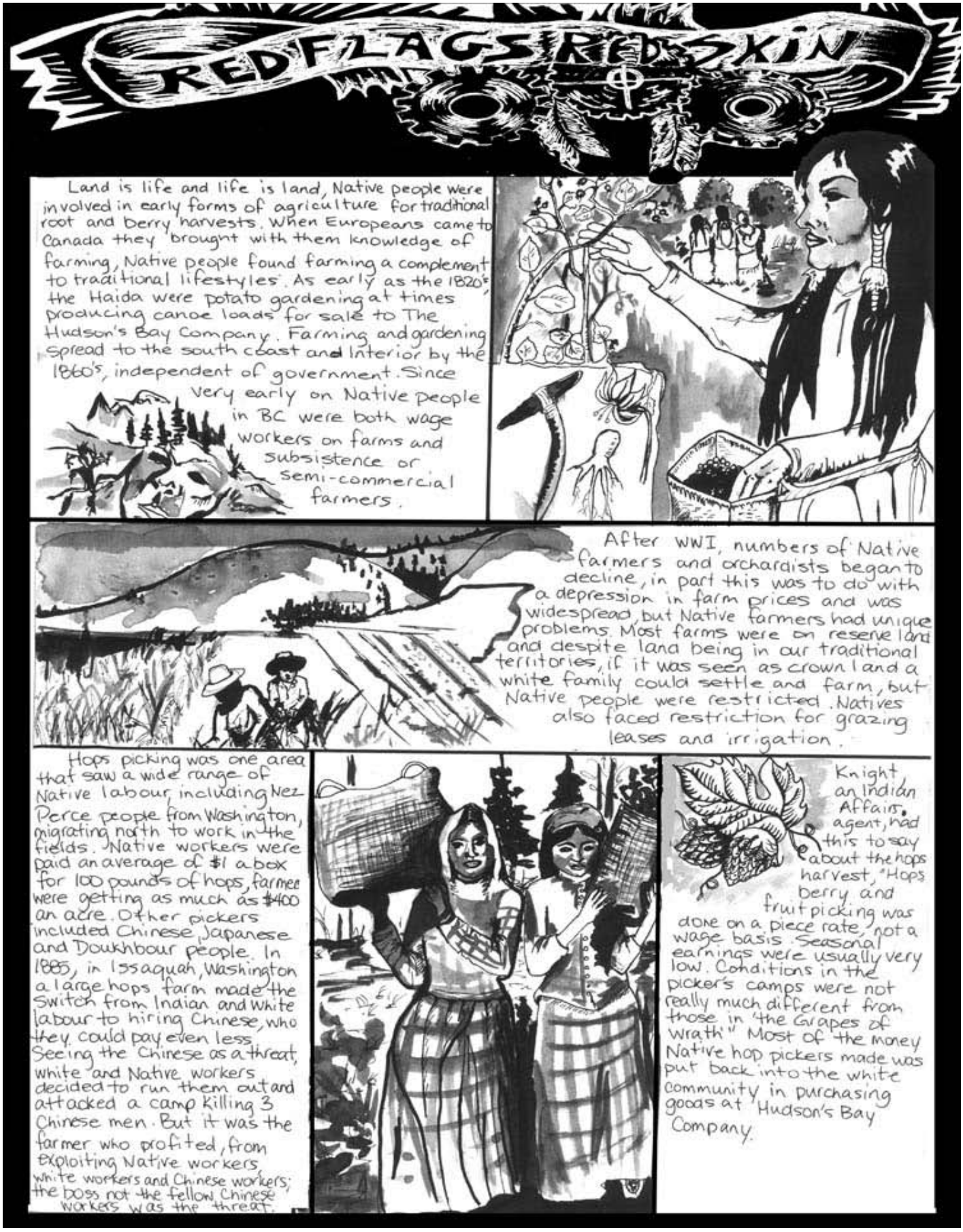
The remains of SPAET Cave.

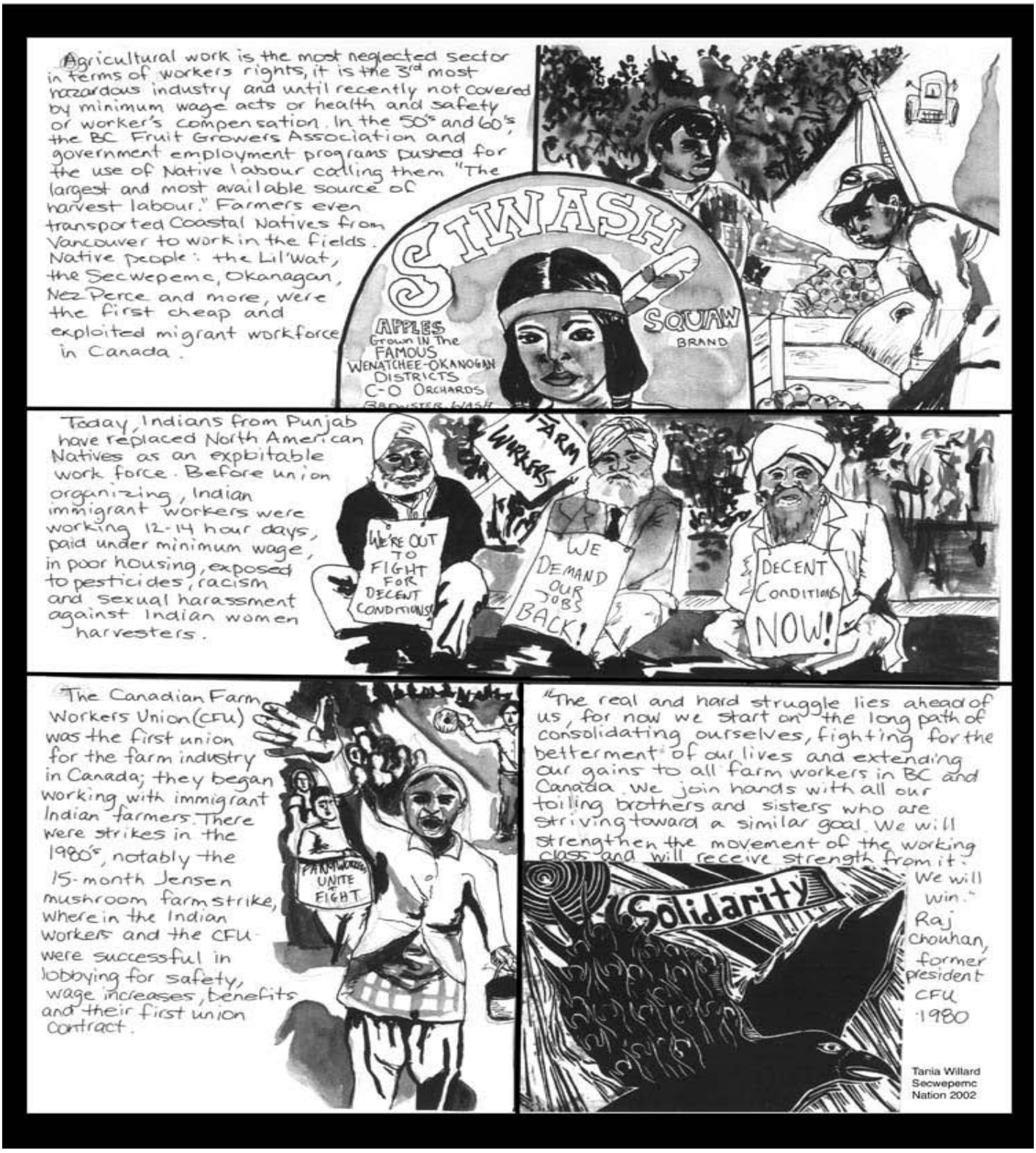
Songhees band council chiefs had participated with the developers in giving the go-ahead to the removal of the roof of the cave—a huge blow to any future claims by the band that the cave is or was sacred.

Further, it became clear that many neighbouring bands were not aware of the 2001 Tsartlip land deal, indicating that some band chiefs and counsellors were withholding information from each other. Amid meetings clouded by the confusion resulting from a total breakdown of communication, band councils turned on their own people. Cheryl Bryce was verbally attacked in absentia and banned from visiting the site of the cave, even when she was asked to go as part of a group seeking to assess the damage to provide information to the negotiators. Bryce responded by calling a community meeting to hear what community members who were being excluded from the shadowy negotiations had to say. Sadly, however, band council members showed up with the RCMP in tow. Several of the band council chiefs and RCMP officers spoke down to Bryce and her supporters, but respected elders from both Tsartlip and Songhees supported her, demonstrating further the disconnect between the "official" leadership and the members of the local communities.

By December 1, information surfaced that negotiations had produced an agreement in principle which may decide the ultimate fate of SPAET Mountain and the sacred cave: in exchange for approximately $8 million towards infrastructure (from the province and the Bear Mountain Corporation), involvement in a potential casino and a "sacred site display" in the residential area of the development, the band council chiefs agreed to forego all future claims and abandon the sacred cave. While all sides denied the agreement in principle existed, it continues to resurface in the ongoing discussions about the development.

Meanwhile, recent pictures of the cave show it almost totally destroyed—ripped open and filled with rock left over from earlier blasting and excavating. There is little doubt that the ultra-wealthy purchasers of the condos and houses on the mountain will soon be moving into their completed residences—priced at between $400,000 and $4,000,000—and that the sound of golf balls being sliced into the rough will replace the sound of backhoes. If possession is nine-tenths of ownership, then the mountain and sacred cave have effectively changed hands, with Len Barrie and his investors reaping the majority of the benefits. But make no mistake: Barrie is not the only villain here. That distinction is shared with the complacent local and provincial governments and the greedy band councils that have betrayed the local Coast Salish people and the sacred places they are charged to protect. SPAET Mountain was not simply stolen—it was at least partially given away. ★


RED FLAGS REDSKIN
Land is life and life is land, Native people were involved in early forms of agriculture for traditional root and berry harvests. When Europeans came to Canada they brought with them knowledge of farming, Native people found farming a complement to traditional lifestyles. As early as the 1820's the Haida were potato gardening at times producing canoe loads for sale to The Hudson's Bay Company. Farming and gardening spread to the south coast and interior by the 1860's, independent of government. Since very early on Native people in BC were both wage workers on farms and subsistence or semi-commercial farmers.
After WWI, numbers of Native farmers and orchardists began to decline, in part this was to do with a depression in farm prices and was widespread, but Native farmers had unique problems. Most farms were on reserve land and despite land being in our traditional territories, if it was seen as crown land a white family could settle and farm, but Native people were restricted. Natives also faced restriction for grazing leases and irrigation.
Hops picking was one area that saw a wide range of Native labour, including Nez Perce people from Washington, migrating north to work in the fields. Native workers were paid an average of $1 a box for 100 pounds of hops, farmers were getting as much as $400 an acre. Other pickers included Chinese, Japanese and Doukhbour people. In 1885, in Issaquah, Washington a large hops farm made the switch from Indian and White labour to hiring Chinese, who they could pay even less. Seeing the Chinese as a threat, white and Native workers decided to run them out and attacked a camp killing 3 Chinese men. But it was the farmer who profited, from exploiting Native workers, white workers and Chinese workers; the boss not the fellow Chinese workers was the threat.
Knight, an Indian Affairs agent, had this to say about the hops harvest, "Hops berry and fruit picking was done on a piece rate, not a wage basis. Seasonal earnings were usually very low. Conditions in the picker's camps were not really much different from those in 'the Grapes of Wrath'." Most of the money Native hop pickers made was put back into the white community in purchasing goods at Hudson's Bay Company.



This graphic story is part of the Red Flags Red Skins series originally published in *Our Times* magazine. The story references images of the Canadian Farmworkers' Union, including a photograph by Jim Monro and Anand Patwardhan (1980) and a photograph by Craig Berggold (1984).

Artist and designer Tania Willard of Red Willow Designs is a member of the Secwepemc (Shuswap) Nation in the Interior of BC. She works with aboriginal, social justice, publishing and health organizations to share indigenous peoples' stories, history and experiences. For more information, e-mail taniawillard@shaw.ca.

A spring election?

Surveying Canada's New Federal Political Landscape

by Murray Cooke

The surprising selection of Stéphane Dion as the new leader of the Liberal Party has changed the dynamic of federal politics, not least because it finalizes the cast of party leaders set to contest an expected spring election. More strikingly, Dion's emphasis on environmental sustainability as one of his "three pillars," alongside economic prosperity and social justice, has helped raise the profile of environmental issues, especially global warming.

In the aftermath of his victory, Dion has been portrayed as a progressive leader. The basis for this portrayal is rather flimsy, however. Presumably it was due to the centrality of environmental issues in his campaign and a few platitudes uttered about social justice. In reality, Dion's credentials as a progressive are about as impressive as those of Al Gore, formerly the US vice-president and, like Dion, currently a booster of the Kyoto Protocol.

What is Dion's record? His most notable achievement while a member of the Chrétien government was the Clarity Act. Some English Canadian nationalists see Dion's fight against the Québec sovereignty movement as a progressive cause. This emphasis on national unity, premised on denying Québec's right to self-determination, should be completely repudiated by the Left. Dion's brief tenure as Environment Minister under Paul Martin saw more hot air (forgive the pun) than concrete achievements. Apparently, Dion just seems so sincere about the environment, even naming his dog Kyoto. A young Stéphane Dion reportedly had a turtle named Trotsky, but not much came of that!

Since his victory, commentators have been trying to figure out Stéphane Dion. As leader, Dion has appointed former cabinet minister Marcel Massé as his principal secretary. Under the Chrétien government, particularly in his role as president of the Treasury Board, Massé wielded a sharp axe over spending and led the attacks on public sector workers. The most nefarious characters in Dion's past (and present), however, are the most obvious—Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin. That anyone who served as a loyal cabinet minister under these prime ministers could be considered a progressive is mind-boggling. To suggest that the modern Liberal Party represents a progressive alternative to the Conservatives is absurd.

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The Liberals: A Brief History of Ruling Class Strategy

The Liberal Party dominated Canadian politics during the 20th century through its skill in managing national tensions between French and English Canada and, as pragmatic social reformers, in also managing class conflicts between capitalists and workers. By defusing national and class conflict, the Liberals gained the staunch loyalty of the Canadian capitalist class. But as the 20th century progressed, the Liberal approach shifted from accommodating to suppressing these political challenges to anglo-capitalist hegemony.

Liberal leaders such as Laurier, Mackenzie King, St. Laurent and Pearson were cautious bridge-builders between French and English Canada. With the rise of Trudeau, the Liberal Party no longer acted as the one able to accommodate Québec nationalism; instead it served as the best bet to smash Québec separatism. Subsequent Liberal leaders, such as

Federal Liberal party leader Stéphane Dion with US secretary of state Condeleezza Rice.

Chrétien and now Stéphane Dion, have followed the Trudeau path.

The Chrétien-Martin Liberals angered Québec voters with the sponsorship scandal, but this is just the latest episode in the erosion of the federal Liberal Party's base in Québec. In the 26 federal elections from 1896 to 1980, the Liberals won a majority of the seats in Québec 24 times. In the seven elections since Trudeau patriated the constitution without Québec's consent (1984-2006), the Liberals have never won a majority of Québec's seats. Stéphane Dion's ability to attract Québec voters should not be dismissed, but the Liberal Party's days as the dominant party in Québec are long gone and that significantly narrows their electoral base.

While Trudeau represented a sea change in the Liberal Party's approach toward Québec, he was also a transitional figure in the Liberal Party's approach to working class demands. There is much contemporary nostalgia about the Trudeau era as the heyday of Liberal reformism, but the Trudeau regime actually helped turn the tide away from social liberalism and Keynesianism toward neoliberalism in Canada. It was under Trudeau that the federal government responded to the labour militancy of the late 1960s and early 70s with wage and price controls and attacks on unions and their leaders. It was also under Trudeau that the Bank of Canada embraced high interest rates and prioritized the fight against inflation and the federal government began backtracking from financial commitments to the provinces for social programs. The Chrétien regime solidified the Liberals' embrace of neoliberalism. Stéphane Dion, appointed to the cabinet by Chrétien in January 1996, was right in the middle of the action. During his leadership campaign, Dion insisted that he was proud of the role he played in slashing government spending in order to rescue Canada from "fiscal insanity."

While the Liberals' intransigent position toward Québec nationalism has sacrificed significant seats to the Bloc Québécois, the Liberals' intransigent position toward working-class interests has not had the same sort of political costs. The Liberals' ability to retain centre left voters reflects the extent of the historic defeats delivered to the trade union movement and the disorientation of the NDP.

In classic Liberal Party fashion, Dion supports withdrawal from Afghanistan if necessary, but not necessarily withdrawal.

Dion and The New Federal Political Scene

So what can we expect from the Liberal Party under Stéphane Dion? A central plank of his economic plan is "targeted" tax cuts for business to encourage innovation. The Liberals are poised to save the environment and uphold the Kyoto protocol in the same fashion that they "saved" healthcare and "defended" the Canada Health Act, namely through a lot of passionate rhetoric and partisan attacks while doing little to challenge privileged interests. Dion, by the way, supports provincial innovation with an increased role for the private sector in the healthcare system. The Liberals aren't sure where they stand on Canada's combat role in Afghanistan. Dion voted against the Conservative government's extension of the Afghanistan mission; however he has been highly critical of the NDP's proposal to withdraw Canadian troops. In classic Liberal Party fashion, Dion supports withdrawal if necessary, but not necessarily withdrawal.

What about the other parties? Despite Stephen Harper's best efforts to appear moderate, he can't hide the neoliberal and social conservative roots of his government. His efforts to build momentum toward a majority government appear stalled. In early 2007, Rona Ambrose took the fall for the prime minister's disastrous environmental policy. Her replacement, John Baird, is a firm believer in the adage that the best defence is a good offence, especially if delivered at high volume. His tenure at the Treasury Board saw the government slash funding for environmental programs, the Court Challenges Program and Status of Women Canada.

Harper now insists that environmental issues are a priority for his government. There is widespread speculation the NDP and the Conservatives will cut a deal on global warming. With the defection of MP Wajid Khan from the Liberals to the government side, the NDP now holds the balance of power. Both the Conservatives and the NDP want to neutralize the Liberal Party's newfound focus on the environment, but significant action coming from this government is hard to imagine. As all the parties know, corporate Canada, not just the oilpatch, remains strongly opposed to the Kyoto targets.

The Green Party could benefit from the current prominence given to environmental issues. Their new leader Elizabeth May placed an impressive second in a London by-election in November, receiving 26 percent of the vote. May is relatively well known from her long stint as executive director of the Sierra Club of Canada. However, May's anti-abortion comments during the by-election

Despite Stephen Harper's best efforts to appear moderate, he can't hide the neoliberal and social conservative roots of his government.

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MAYOR MILLER AND TORONTO'S SUBURBS

Colonization and competition

BY STEFAN KIPFER

Mayor Miller (right) with Liberal Ontario premier Dalton McGuinty: concessions to greater centralization of decision-making.

In the City of Toronto, the 2006 municipal elections brought few surprises. Incumbent Mayor David Miller was declared the winner seconds after the polls closed. The composition of city council changed little except to shift slightly to the centre left. The new council is even more white and male than before, with three fewer women and only four councillors of colour (less than ten percent —in a city where soon the only visible minorities will be people of European descent).

Mayor Miller faced little serious electoral opposition. Challenger Jane Pitfield's right-wing campaign resonated little, in part because Miller had incorporated some of her concerns. When Pitfield asked for law and order, Miller was able to point to his record of consecutive increases to the police budget; his contribution to the NDP campaign for harsher penalties for gun possession; and his initiative to prevent youth criminality with recreation and job placement measures targeted on specific neighbourhoods (the "Strong Neighbourhoods" initiative). In response to Pitfield's proposal to criminalize street populations, Miller referred to his own, supposedly "soft" attempt to get the homeless off the street (the "Streets to Home" strategy borrowed from New York City).

The power brokers who brought Miller's predecessor Mel Lastman to power in the late 1990s did not perceive Miller as a threat. Like Lastman, Miller has surrounded himself with Bay Street fundraisers with strong Tory and Liberal connections since his first mayoral campaign in 2003. During his first term, Miller established a largely cordial relationship with the Toronto Board of Trade. He agreed to a strategy of shifting corporate property taxes gradually onto the shoulders of residential ratepayers to move the City's property tax structure closer to that of surrounding municipalities.

Miller also gave in to the demands of the province and the Board of Trade by accepting provisions in the new City of Toronto Act that will allow for a further centralization of decision-making power at city hall. At the beginning of the new municipal budget process, Miller instructed city departments to freeze their budgets, thus continuing a policy of fiscal austerity that dates back to the early 1990s.

The Metropolitan Mainstream

Miller counts on good connections with business fractions and the support of centrist politicians from across the city. But his core supporters include social democratic forces (labour unions, the NDP), urban environmentalists and central city youth and public space activists. These supporters applauded Miller's reluctance to follow his predecessor with explicit privatization drives and his (uneven, but real) support for environmental initiatives and the arts.

Miller's politics most clearly expresses the desires of a broader "metropolitan mainstream." This term was coined by Zurich-based researchers Christian Schmid and Daniel Weiss to describe a social milieu rooted in mostly white central city class fractions: liberal-professional gentrifiers, "urbane" developers, artists and hipsters.

The metropolitan mainstream is politically ambiguous. It may be progressive in terms of consumption choices, and is at least superficially supportive of cultural and sexual diversity. Yet it is open to neoliberal economic tendencies. It is prone to punitive impulses with respect to the homeless, youth of colour and radical activists.

The dark side of Miller's metropolitan mainstream is difficult to overlook. His campaign for a beautiful city and magnificent waterfront development borrows from that of current Chicago Mayor Daley, and from Chicago's original "City Beautiful" campaign of the early 20th century. The Chicago model produced fantastic waterfronts for the rich but banished African-American and Latino populations to increasingly distant margins.

In today's Toronto, social polarizations are increasingly lived as a contrast between, on the one hand, the central city's gentrified districts and the Yonge Street

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spine of establishment neighbourhoods and, on the other hand, the demonized postwar apartment and townhouse complexes of suburban North Etobicoke, North York, and Scarborough.

Miller's downtown-centred metropolitan mainstream has a quasi-colonial relationship with Toronto's older low-income suburbs. In this relationship, the urban good life is seen as being threatened by outlying districts populated by an uncivilized, non-white underclass of real or potential thugs and gang members.

During the November campaign, Miller was shown in a few photo-ops surrounded by black kids, who, the readers were meant to believe, were grateful for Miller's benevolent presence. The undertone was clear: even for Miller, these kids represent a potential threat to be contained (with a combination of aggressive anti-gang policing and "well-meaning" targeted crime control strategies).

Miller admitted as much when he defended his emphasis on neighbourhood-specific crime control by warning that "the riots in France [in 2005] tell us we shouldn't take for granted that we're a peaceful equitable society." Only days after the election, Mayor-elect Miller joined Ontario premier Dalton McGuinty in applauding Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Bill C-35, which further restricts bail conditions for those accused of gun crimes.

The Weight of the New Suburbs

If the metropolitan mainstream of Miller's Toronto relates to the stigmatized districts in the postwar suburbs in a neo-colonial fashion, it is locked in a competitive struggle with the newer suburban municipalities outside the City boundaries. Since the 1970s, municipal and regional governments in Peel, York, Durham and Halton regions have attracted developers and businesses with aggressive pro-growth policies and low corporate property taxes. Today, this heartland of central Canadian neoliberalism and neoconservatism is home to the majority of the population and the vast majority of newly created jobs in the Greater Toronto Area.

The urban good life is seen as being threatened by outlying districts populated by an uncivilized, non-white underclass of real or potential thugs and gang members.

Since the late 1990s, concerns over unregulated sprawl have pushed both Tory and Liberal governments to adopt (half-hearted) growth controls on the Oak Ridges Moraine and the lands now designated by Queen's Park as the green belt. During last year's municipal election campaign, a decade-long trend towards politicizing the explosive growth in the new suburbs continued.

In some new suburbs, the elections were characterized by controversy over the high degree of control real estate developers exercise over local and regional decision making. The Sierra Club contributed to these efforts by getting candidates to sign their "green pledge." Citizen support for the provincial Green Belt and opposition to sprawl and corruption shaped campaigns across the GTA and led to the (re-)election of a number of reform-minded mayors and councillors in Ajax, Oakville, Pickering and Vaughan.

Since the 1980s, the social make-up of suburbs like Markham, Richmond Hill, Mississauga and Brampton has changed dramatically. Some of these municipalities are more diverse ethnically than downtown Toronto, and a small fraction of that diversity is now reflected on city councils. Despite their reputation as wealthy bastions, poverty and homelessness is reported to have multiplied in these suburbs over the last decade.

But life in the new suburbs is still shaped by a privatized form of development centred on single family houses. Most services are provided by private contractors. Public space, public transit and social housing are absent or barely visible. And most conflicts are among propertied interests (ratepayers, farmers, retailers, developers). This makes it an uphill battle for anyone who wants to link environmentalism with social justice.

Different Futures?

Struggles that pursue a political path independent of the metropolitan mainstream and the Toronto NDP exist. But they are limited in number and capacity. They include the No One Is Illegal campaign against detentions and deportations of migrants without documents; actions of the Ontario Coalition against Poverty to get supplementary diet allowances for welfare recipients and their support for criminalized Somali residents in Rexdale; the Workers Action Centre's advocacy for non-unionized, low-waged workers in precarious employment; and the Toronto Women's Network's patient strategy to build an independent feminist base among poor women of colour.

Any radical challenge to Miller's alliance confronts two strategic problems: First, how is it possible to avoid replicating the quasi-colonial relationship of fear, control and paternalism that exists between downtown political circles (left or right) and the racialized quarters in Toronto's postwar suburbs? And second, how can activists address the serious structural constraints that have entrenched neoliberalism in the very heart of the city hall? Next to the financial burden of two decades of federal and provincial downloading, these constraints include the competition for investment among municipalities in the Toronto region, within which the City no longer represents the majority of the population.

With the exception of some minor shifts, the municipal elections in the Toronto area have brought more of the same: "urbane" but exclusive world city aspirations in the City of Toronto and sprawling growth politics in the new suburbs. While the situation is not as grim as it was during the height of the Harris regime ten years ago, the obstacles to building an independent urban left politics informed by socialist, feminist, anti-racist and left-green concerns are high. This is true both in the new suburbs and in the Toronto of Mayor Miller's metropolitan mainstream. ★

Anti-colonial responses to gender violence

BY ANDREA SMITH

Native women celebate: By centering women of colour in the analysis, we may actually build a movement that more effectively ends violence not just for women of colour but for all women.

Because sexual violence has served as a tool of colonialism and white supremacy, the struggle for indigenous sovereignty and the struggle against sexual violence cannot be separated. In my activist work, I have often heard the following sentiment expressed in Indian country: "We do not have time to address sexual/domestic violence in our communities because we have to work on 'survival' issues first." However, statistics show that indigenous women suffer death rates from domestic violence that are higher than any other group of women.

We are clearly not "surviving" as long as issues of gender violence go unaddressed. It has been through sexual violence and through the imposition of European gender relationships that Europeans were able to colonize Native peoples in the first place. If we maintain these patriarchal gender systems, we will be unable to decolonize and fully assert our sovereignty.

Conceptualizing sexual violence as a tool of genocide and colonialism fundamentally alters the strategies for combating it. When sexual violence is viewed in this light, it is clear that we must develop anti-colonial strategies for addressing interpersonal violence that also address state violence.

Criminal Justice

For many years, activists in the rape crisis and domestic violence movements have promoted strengthening the criminal justice system as the primary way to reduce sexual and domestic violence. Particularly since the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in the US in 1994, antiviolence centers received a considerable amount of funding from the government, to the point where most agencies are dependent on the government for their continued existence. Consequently, their strategies tend to be government-friendly: hire more police, give longer sentences to rapists, pass mandatory arrest laws, etc.

There is a contradiction, however, in relying upon the government to solve problems it is responsible for creating. Native people are the most arrested, most incarcerated and most victimized by police brutality of any ethnic group in the US. Given the oppression Native people face within the criminal justice system, many communities are developing their own programs for addressing criminal behaviour, which often draw on some of the principles of "restorative justice."

Restorative Justice

"Restorative justice" is an umbrella term that describes a wide range of programs that attempt to address crime from a reconciliatory rather than a punitive framework. As opposed to the state criminal justice system, which focuses on punishing the perpetrator and removing him (or her) from society through imprisonment, restorative justice attempts to involve all parties (perpetrators, victims and community members) in determining the appropriate response to a crime in an effort to restore the community to wholeness.

These models have been particularly well developed by many Native communities, especially in Canada, where the sovereign status of Native nations allows them an opportunity to develop community-based justice programs. During the time that the Hollow Water reserve in Canada used a community approach (from approximately 1984 to 1996), 48 offenders were identified. Only five chose to go to jail, and only two who entered the program have committed crimes since.

They are also most successful in small, geographically isolated areas where it is more difficult for the perpetrator to simply move to another area. Such programs are also more likely to be successful in addressing child sexual abuse. However, adult survivors of domestic and sexual violence are often pressured to "forgive and forget" in tribal mediation programs that focus more on maintaining family and tribal unity than on providing justice and safety for women. In addition, in cases involving an adult woman victim, community members are more likely to blame her instead of the perpetrator for the assault.

This article was abridged and adapted from Andrea Smith's book Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide *(South End Press, 2005). Andrea Smith is Cherokee and a professor of Native American Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and co-founder of Incite! Women of Color Against Violence and the Boarding School Healing Project, and is a contributing author in* INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence*, reviewed in this issue.*

Imprisonment

Because of problems encountered with restorative justice approaches, some advocates argue that incarceration is the most appropriate way to confront sexual violence. The argument goes that if a Native man rapes someone, he subscribes to white values rather than Native values, because rape is not an indigenous tradition. Thus, if he follows white values, he should suffer the white way of punishment.

However, Native antiviolence advocates also struggle with a number of difficulties in using imprisonment as the primary strategy to solve the problem of sexual violence. First, so few rapes are reported that the criminal justice system rarely has the opportunity to address the problem. Incarceration has been largely ineffective in reducing crime rates in the dominant society, much less in Native communities. In the words of sociologist Luana Ross, "The white criminal justice system does not work for white people; what makes us think it's going to work for us?"

Policing under tribal control is not necessarily an improvement, as can be attested to by the countless charges of police brutality. For example, in the mid-1990s, indigenous children in Montana were calling the reservation police "terminators." In 2002, the entire police force on the Rocky Boys Indian Reservation in Montana was placed on probation because of allegations of police brutality.

State Violence Against Women

State violence—in the form of the criminal justice system—cannot provide true safety for women, particularly women of colour, when it is directly implicated in the violence women face. Consider these examples:

- An undocumented woman calls the police because of domestic violence. Under mandatory arrest laws, the police must arrest someone on domestic violence calls. Because the police cannot find the batterer, they arrest her and have her deported (Tucson).
- An African-American homeless woman calls the police because she has been the victim of group rape. The police arrest her for prostitution (Chicago).
- An African-American woman calls the police when her husband, who is battering her, accidentally sets fire to their apartment. She is arrested for setting the fire (New York).
- A Native woman calls the police because she is the victim of domestic violence, and she is shot to death by police (Alert Bay, NWT).

Abused women often end up in jail as a result of trying to protect themselves. For instance, over 40 percent of the women in prison in Arizona were there because they murdered an abusive partner. The criminal justice system, rather than solving the problems of violence against women, often revictimizes women of colour who are survivors of violence. In addition, those who go to prison for domestic violence are disproportionately people of colour.

Increasingly, domestic violence advocates are coming to recognize the limitations of the criminal justice system. This recognition gave rise to the joint statement by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence and Critical Resistance, "Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex: Interpersonal and State Violence Against Women of Color."

Solving the Dilemma

All women of colour, including Native women, live in the dangerous intersections of gender and race. Within the mainstream antiviolence movement in the US, women of colour who survive sexual or domestic abuse are often told that they must pit themselves against their communities, often stereotypically portrayed as violent, to begin the healing process. Communities of colour, meanwhile, often pressure women to remain silent about sexual and domestic violence in order to maintain a "united front" against racism.

We face a dilemma: on the one hand, the incarceration approach promotes the repression of communities of colour without really providing safety for survivors. On the other hand, restorative justice models often promote community silence and denial around issues of sexual violence without concern for the safety of survivors.

I argue for the need to adopt antiviolence strategies that are mindful of the larger structures of violence that shape the world in which we live. When we centre women of colour in the analysis, it becomes clear that our strategies must be informed by approaches that also combat violence directed against communities, including state violence—police brutality, prisons, militarism, racism, colonialism and economic exploitation. The issues of colonialism, race, class and gender oppression cannot be separated. By centring women of colour in the analysis, we may actually build a movement that more effectively ends violence not just for women of colour but for all women. ★

Today, more community-based organisations are developing strategies that do not primarily rely on the state to end domestic violence. Because these models attempt to get at the root causes of violence, they do not offer simple panaceas for addressing this problem. Examples include:

- Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA, Seattle), which organises around the issue of prison abolition from an antiviolence perspective.
- Sista II Sista (Brooklyn), an organisation of young women of colour that recruits young women to attend freedom schools which provide political education from an integrated mind-body-spirit framework, then trains girls to become activists on their own behalf.
- Friends Are Reaching Out (FAR Out, Seattle), an organisation which works with queer and LGBT communities of colour. The premise of this model is that when people are abused, they become isolated. FAR Out encourages development of friendship groups, and as a result builds the capacity of a community to handle domestic violence.

BOOK REVIEW

Insight into violence

Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology
By: INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence
Published by: South End Press, 2006

Reviewed by: Jackie Esmonde

When Ontario's criminal justice system adopted a "zero tolerance" policy towards domestic violence in the 1990s, many feminists cheered what was seen as a great step towards ending violence against women. The policy requires that police officers lay charges whenever there is a complaint of domestic violence, and Crown Attorneys must prosecute the offence even if the victim wants the charge withdrawn—ensuring that men cannot pressure women to drop charges against them.

INCITE's anthology, *Color of Violence*, demonstrates quite starkly that it was far too early to celebrate. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence was founded seven years ago, when more than two thousand activists from diverse communities came together to strategize about ending the war being waged against women of colour in the US and around the world. INCITE! now has more than 20 chapters throughout the US and Canada, and is actively challenging the way feminists think about violence. *Color of Violence* is the first of two anthologies.

The anthology includes 30 articles addressing three themes: reconceptualising anti-violence strategies, forms of violence and building movements. These articles present strong and challenging arguments from key anti-violence activists such as Julia Sudbury, Andrea Smith, Haunani-Kay Trask and groups such as Sista II Sista and TransJustice.

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Rethinking the nature of violence

Many of the contributions are fairly academic in style, though the anthology also includes other forms of writing including poetry and story telling. All of the contributions are grounded in the actual experiences of women of colour. While the book is strongly immersed in US struggles and issues, the analysis is easily applicable to the situation in Canada and is informed by a deeply held solidarity with women all over the world.

The anthology's key contribution is its demand that anti-violence activists stop focusing solely on inter-personal violence such as domestic violence and sexual assault and models of organizing that are based on the experiences of white middle class women. It begins from the understanding that women of colour are more likely to be harmed by the police, prisons and social services than to be helped. With this insight, it is clear that the central task of anti-violence activists is to address state violence.

By placing women of colour at the centre of the analysis, the anthology's contributors begin to map out the various ways in which women of colour experience violence. Dorothy Roberts' chapter on racist adoption policy dramatically documents the overrepresentation of black children in foster homes. Renee Saucedo writes on INS raids and how immigrant women are fighting back. Sarah Deer documents the impact of Federal Indian Law and crime in indigenous communities. Nirmals Erevelles astutely points out the violent ways in which global capitalism creates illness and poverty and discriminates on the basis of disability. Every chapter reflects on the intersections between race, gender and the state, and demands that anti-violence activists understand that the violence women of colour experience is far greater than simply interpersonal conflict.

When violence is understood in this light, it is clear then why "zero tolerance" prosecution policies, such as the one in Ontario, cannot work. As Julia Sudbury notes in her chapter, it is common for both women and men to be prosecuted through such policies. Women of colour who experience male violence are more likely to be criminalized than to be protected. Dorothy Roberts notes that "mandatory arrest" and "no drop" policies in the US have led to the arrest of a disproportionate number of low income and minority men, but have failed to protect low income and minority women. The criminal justice system is overwhelmingly experienced as a source of oppression for communities of colour and poor people—and as such it cannot be a source for liberation.

For this insight and many others, *Color of Violence* is absolutely essential reading for anyone who cares about feminism, racism, colonialism and capitalism and points the way forward for activists who want to make the world a better place.★

Why 'Iraqi Control' does not mean Iraqi control

By Michael Schwartz

A key element of President Bush's changed strategy in Iraq is "Iraqification of the struggle."

In fact, Iraqification has been underway for over a year. The new proposals only speak about accelerating it, modifying the methods by which it will be implemented, and other such details.

But this rhetoric conceals the most sinister element in American policy: *Iraqification (like Vietnamization 35 years earlier) is not about creating an independent Iraqi army; it is actually a strategy for creating Iraqi military units under American command, and using them as combat troops in the continuing American effort to pacify the country.*

This sad (and lethal) fact can be seen in the recent events in the Shia holy city Najaf, the location—two years ago—of two bloody battles between the Americans and the Sadrist Mahdi Army. On December 20, 2006, Iraqification reached Najaf with full force: to quote the *Yahoo News* headline, "US troops turn over Najaf to Iraqis." Thus, Najaf became the third province to be fully Iraqified, and this important event received substantial coverage in the mainstream media (including the *New York Times, Associated Press*, and the *BBC*. The *Times,* for example, declared that this handover of control gave the Iraqi government the command over its own military that it had long been seeking:

Graffiti depicting the torture of Iraqi prisoners

"With the transfer, the Iraqi government gained control over its Eighth Army Division, which has about 10,000 soldiers. Shiite leaders, who control both this province and the national government, have been anxious to get more operational control over the army."

This seems pretty straightforward, and the imagery of all the coverage made it clear that, from that point forward, the Iraqis would be responsible for maintaining law and order, for arresting miscreants (political or criminal) and for deciding military and policing strategy in the province. The Associated Press quoted Iraqi Lt. General Nasier Abadi, the deputy chief of staff of the Iraqi Army, declaring that this handover was *"important for Iraq because, up until now, everybody thinks that the coalition is doing the governing, so now Iraqis need to take over the responsibility."* The same article, however, included the cautionary note that *"American forces will remain on standby in the area in case violence erupts again."*

Only one week later, the real meaning of Iraqi military "control" in Najaf province was revealed when an important Sadrist leader, Samir al-Amiri, was killed by a US soldier in Najaf during what *UPI* described as "a joint raid with Iraqi forces."

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Irqai soldiers on patrol in Mosul.

The brief (one paragraph) UPI account of a "joint raid" seems wholly inconsistent with the image of American forces being "on standby…in case violence erupts again." This inconsistency is reinforced when we read the more complete *Washington Post* account, which quotes Maj. General William B. Caldwell, the top US military spokesman in Iraq, describing the event as a raid on Amiri's house because of his suspected involvement in "illegal activities." This can hardly be viewed as a response to a new "eruption of violence."

Caldwell claimed that the action was "*consistent with the fact that Najaf now has been passed to provincial Iraqi control*" because *"US forces don't operate there independently."* That is, *"the raid was led by 35 soldiers from the 8th Iraqi Army Division Forces, with eight U.S. troops serving as advisers."* It was one of the advisers, then, who fired the shot or shots that killed Amiri on the roof of his house, as he tried to escape the invading troops.

So the picture that emerges is that the Americans involved in the raid were advisors and not combat troops; and that the raid was an Iraqi operation, not an American one. And this gives us a clearer picture of "Iraqification"—it involves the use of Iraqi units accompanied by U.S. advisers, with American troops acting only as back-ups that were, in this case, not needed.

There is one other element in the mix that completes the description of how Iraqification works: Sadiq al-Rikabi, an aide to Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, registered a protest over the raid because, he said, it violated the rules for the transfer of control in Najaf:

"The agreement between the two sides when the security profile was transferred to the Iraqi side is that the Iraqi side should know about any operations or actions done by the multinational forces."

This complaint appears straightforward: Rikabi is unhappy because the Iraqi government was not "in the loop;" that the raid took place without their foreknowledge. But this is actually very peculiar, coming from what is supposed to be the legal authority in the province, since we would expect them to be "in charge" of deciding whether or not the raid should have taken place at all.

Moreover, if General Caldwell's account is correct (and no one has disputed it), the main forces in the raid were the Iraqi 8th Army Division. This is precisely the unit that was transferred, eight days earlier, to Iraqi command. Yet, the Iraqi high command in Baghdad was not aware of the raid, let alone in command of their own troops.

The key to all this is contained in Rikabi's statement that this operation was executed by "the multinational forces" which are, of course, commanded by the US military. We need to appreciate that the Iraqi 8th Army Division—though it has Iraqi officers—is actually integrated into the "multinational forces," as are all the other Iraqi military units trained and equipped by the US. They are therefore under the command structure of the occupation, and their operations are ultimately part of the overall operations of the U.S. military, just the same as the British and other members of the "coalition of the willing."

What, then, changed in Najaf when "control" was transferred to the Iraqis? The transfer of "control" involved three dovetailed changes in the military command structure there. First, Iraqi officers were placed in command of the newly combat-ready Iraqi units, notably the 8th Army Division, replacing the American training officers who had commanded them up until that time. This transition is important because the US has had little

faith in the Iraqi officer corps, which has never been a reliable ally to the American effort, sometimes siding with the Sunni insurgents, often revealing strong loyalties to Shia militias, and almost always tolerating or instigating massive corruption in their units.

Second—and largely because of this lack of faith in the Iraqi officers—the American military placed US advisers with each of the units, down to the platoon level, to oversee and advise the operations undertaken by the Iraqi units. These advisers have great authority, and could be seen as the actual commanders of the units, except that the handful of advisors could not fully manage the operations of the units. Thus, the advisors are themselves vulnerable to the actions taken by Iraqi officers and troops, often relying for their safety on the actions of their Iraqi cohorts.

Third, the transfer meant that "American" units—those with exclusively American personnel—retreated to nearby bases for "standby" duty. Starting on December 20, all the units operating in Najaf were therefore "Iraqi" units, with Iraqi officers and American advisors. *But, these Iraqi units were—as Rikabi noted—part of the "multinational forces."* Most importantly, this meant that the Iraqi officers in charge of these units took their orders from the multinational command; that is, from the American officers in charge of the occupation. The transfer of control did not alter the fact that the Iraqi units were under U.S. command.

So far, there is no sign that the Bush Administration is ready to consider the actual withdrawal of the United States from Iraq.

The raid on Amiri's house that resulted in his death was an operation planned by the leadership of the multinational forces, and executed by Iraqi units under their command. The fact that Amiri was killed by a US soldier was an incidental part of the operation—he might well have been killed by an Iraqi soldier.

Notice that the complaint of the Iraqi government does not question any part of this arrangement. Rikabi does not question the authority of the Americans to decide what military engagements to undertake in Najaf province. Nor does Rikabi question the authority of the American commanders over Iraqi troops. Rikabi does not even question the American decision to raid Amiri's house. His only complaint is that the Baghdad government should have been informed of the raid (and other such military actions) *before* it took place.

The transfer of "control" is not a transfer of control at all. It is a simple substitution of Iraqi for American troops in Najaf. Its principle consequence will be that fewer Americans will be killed and wounded, and more Iraqis will be killed and wounded in the ongoing war.

So far, there is no sign that the Bush Administration—or any of its numerous advisors on changing strategy in Iraq—is ready to consider the actual withdrawal of the United States from Iraq. Iraqification, like all of the other "new" strategies being considered, is simply a new way to accomplish the goal of conquest and pacification. ★

Majority government unlikely

Continued from page 27

campaign alienated many otherwise sympathetic observers. The next election may be a make-or-break contest for the party. In the current context, if they don't achieve a breakthrough and win a seat, which remains a longshot, they may be doomed to electoral irrelevance, at least under the current electoral system.

NDP: Mired By Its Longstanding Contradictions?

Beyond the dangerous game of footsie being played with the Conservative government, the NDP remains mired by its longstanding contradictions. The NDP continues to take progressive stances on Québec when no one is paying attention. At its latest federal convention, held in Québec City, the party revisited its policy toward Québec through the so-called Sherbrooke Declaration, declaring that the NDP "recognizes the national character of Québec." Any momentum that this may have built for the party in Québec was overshadowed by Liberal Michael Ignatieff's support for recognizing Québec as a nation and then, most surprisingly of all, the Conservative government's motion recognizing Québecers as forming a nation within Canada.

Even bolder, the NDP also declared that they "would recognize a majority decision (50% + 1) of the Quebec people in the event of a referendum on the political status of Quebec."

However, if Jack Layton thinks he can campaign on this principled critique of the Clarity Act without a repeat of the events of the 2004 election campaign, when he was attacked by prominent members of his own party, then he's got another thing coming.

The NDP convention passed an important motion calling for a withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan. It remains to be seen whether Layton pushes hard on this issue. Otherwise, much of the NDP program, especially on economic policy, remains a muddle.

Thankfully, due in large part to the continuing strength of the Bloc Québécois, it appears rather unlikely that either the Conservatives or Liberals are poised to form a majority government. The current electoral options remain uninspiring. The Liberal leadership of Stéphane Dion does nothing to change that. As a defensive measure, the defeat of the Harper government remains a priority, but the Left faces a bigger challenge of building a grassroots movement in the short-term and constructing alternatives over the longer term. ★

CUBA
What comes after Fidel?

By Harold Lavender

As the Fidel era in Cuba draws to a close, there is lively debate about Cuba's future both in the left as whole and within the New Socialist Group. This article will examine some possibilities and potential dangers from a critical anti-imperialist perspective.

Fidel Castro (right) with brother Raul.

The future of Cuba is not predetermined. A number of key factors will influence the outcome:

- The international relationship of forces, in particular whether there is a revolutionary upsurge in Latin America.
- The state of the Cuban economy.
- Choices made by the post-Fidel leadership of the Cuban Communist Party.
- The political consciousness and activity of the Cuban people.

Imperialist Intervention

The Cuban government has prepared an orderly process of succession. But Washington is working hard to impose a neo-liberal capitalist market economy subordinated to imperialism. The US-aided opposition masquerades under the banner of "human rights," but all they offer is a truncated form of liberal democracy, increased exploitation and oppression.

The current context does not favour direct US military aggression. Nonetheless, American neo-cons hope that the death of Fidel will afford new opportunities. And counter-revolutionary sections of the Cuban exiles in Miami are still determined to take Cuba back.

Forward or Backward?

Can the Cuban revolution survive and move forward in a socialist direction? Or is it in danger of going the way of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe?

Cuba faced a very difficult decade in the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Isolated and under intense economic pressure, which led to a decline in living standards, the Cuban revolution has survived.

Cuba has partially overcome its international isolation. Cuba's prestige in the world is high for having stood up to imperialism and offered concrete aid, such as sending doctors abroad.

It also maintains a strong base of domestic support, although it is unclear whether the Cuban Communist Party commands the same support as Fidel. To assess the future of the Cuban government, we need to understand history and to project forward.

A Revolutionary History

The Cuban revolution was made by a guerrilla army in the name of the politically heterogeneous July 26 Movement. Afterwards, Fidel and Che won a power struggle and took control of the revolution. US imperialism began its opposition with economic reprisals and, from 1959 onward, actively planned to overthrow the revolution.

The Cuban leadership responded by carrying through a socialist revolution that destroyed the economic and state power of the dependent Cuban oligarchy and imperialism. The success of the Cuban revolution is the basis for the legitimacy of the current regime.

The Cuban leadership consolidated power by making an alliance with the Soviet Union to create the current Cuban Communist Party. The Soviet Union, for its own purposes, aided Cuba at a time when other states were unwilling or unable to defy Washington.

But this relationship did have negative consequences in forming a statist model of economic development, and in leaving a legacy of neo-Stalinist ideological and political influences.

Nonetheless, between 1959 and 1985, Cuba achieved substantial economic growth. The lives of the most exploited and oppressed improved, and social and racial justice and the status of women advanced.

The greatest advances have occurred in health and education (funding remained a priority throughout the difficult decade of the 90s). Cuba's average life expectancy is among the top 25 in the world and almost equal to the US.

Many Cubans continue to support the revolution because of socialist ideals

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and material gains from the revolution. Nationalist sentiment against being re-subjugated to US imperialism also plays a role.

Although there is increasing cultural and religious freedom, there are real limits on political freedom. This is not surprising given the pressure of US imperialism.

Cuba is a one-party state in which the Communist Party and bureaucratic officials control the governing apparatus. There is a national assembly and people can participate as individuals. But no organized opposition is permitted, even within the framework of the revolution.

Cuba has mass organizations and unions. But they do not act autonomously of the Cuban Communist Party and state. There is not a political culture of unfettered public debate. And there are no independent (i.e. community-controlled) media.

Cuba is a state-owned economy, rather than a socialized economy of freely associated producers under workers control, governed by workers and community councils.

Cuba is respected in Latin America for its achievements. But today, people do not see one-party communist states as models. Instead, people in Latin America are inspired by a wide variety of other experiences, ranging from the Zapatistas, to the militant self-organized indigenous and popular movements in Bolivia, to the recovered factories movement in Argentina, to the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, and especially the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, which may move towards socialism within a democratic framework.

International Questions

Cuba will not succeed in the transition to socialism if it stands isolated in a global capitalist economy. The Cuban leadership has been staunchly internationalist in outlook, especially in regard to Third World liberation.

In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, murderous US-backed dictatorships destroyed both armed revolutionary and peaceful strategies for fundamental change in Latin America. Today, the failure of neo-liberalism is opening up new possibilities for the Left, especially in Latin America.

However, the election of "left governments" does not guarantee success. Cuba cultivates an alliance with Lula in Brazil. But the Lula government plays by the rules of international financial institutions. By contrast, People's Trade Agreement (an economic accord between Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia) does challenge neo-liberal economic policies, as does the exchange of Cuban doctors for Venezuelan oil. In Venezuela, Chavez is talking increasingly about socialism, though Venezuela has not yet made a break with capitalism.

Cuba's economic horizons are confined by the US embargo of almost 50 years duration. If the neo-cons continue to suffer reverses, some sections of US capital may press for an easing or eventual lifting of the embargo. But they will undoubtedly seek major concessions in return.

Cuba Adapts

The Cuban Revolution won support by improving people's lives. In the 1990s, it pragmatically staved off collapse by adapting to the market. The Cuban economy is now growing again and appears to have new, if uneven, momentum.

Some measures have worked, like the introduction of agricultural producers markets and family-owned business in services. Strict controls have blocked the formation of a new private capitalist class.

Energy shortages prompted Cuba to adopt more ecologically sound polices in agriculture and other areas.

The operation of a parallel dollar economy has proved more problematic. It has led to the development of a parasitic class of tens of thousands who earn vastly more than Cuban teachers and wage workers.

In the 1990s, the state sector shrank considerably and now employs less than 75 per cent of the population. The Cuban government has emphasized socialist values. But this is not always effective, especially as dollarization and the market promote uneven economic development, increased inequality and economic individualism.

The Cuban state (including the army) is increasingly entering into joint economic ventures with foreign firms and states. In some cases, this may increase possibilities for independent development. Cuba is now partnering with Venezuela and China to promote development of offshore oil and ethanol.

Difficult Choices

Strong currents within Cuba favour an increasing turn to the market. However, this entails the potential risks of greater inequality, fewer resources for welfare and public services, and an undermining of the socialist project.

The government faces difficult choices. Under the pressure of the US, the Cuban Communist Party keeps a united but closed face to the world. As a result, there are no public political tendencies in Cuba. But in the future there could be major divisions within the CP over issues such as how far to turn to the market and whether to opt for political reforms.

The Cuban government is pursuing an alliance with China and cheap Chinese consumer goods are beginning to be widely available. Tilting towards the Chinese model of a one-party state, widespread repression, and the use of capitalist methods to increase economic growth would be very worrisome.

Other currents favouring market reforms might prefer this within a more Latin American, and even social democratic, framework. This might entail some level of political reform.

Large numbers of Cubans, including supporters of the revolution, may demand some expansion of liberties.

The Cuban people need to have an active say in shaping these decisions. the current trend toward disengagement from politics, especially among younger Cubans, could favour the consolidation of a bureaucratic and technocratic layer and would not advance the Cuban revolution towards socialism.

Cuba needs to maintain a revolutionary internationalist orientation and work to build itself from below. ★

CHINA

Women, workers and globalization

By Stephanie Luce

China has been a leading economic power for much of recorded human history; only the last few centuries have been an exception. Now we see China returning to prominence on a global scale. Not only is its economic power as a nation growing rapidly, but it is home to the largest labour force in the world.

Although it officially calls its economy socialist, few outside China would agree with this definition. Yet it would be a mistake to consider China as home to a free market. While the country is held up as a model of global capitalism, the Chinese state is playing an active role in the development of production in China. The state is essentially buying jobs from other countries, by creating special economic zones, joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) and giving corporations a host of special privileges and rights. As author Andrew Ross argues, the Chinese government has even helped employers in their efforts to keep wages low, by helping bring in new and more workers from the western part of the country.

All this development has created the largest tide of human migration in history. From the late 1980s to late 1990s, over 75 million people moved from rural China to the coast, to work primarily in construction and manufacturing. In the last few years, migration to the east continues, while new migrant streams have emerged to other parts of the country that are now seeing growth.

While the private sector has grown, workers in the public sector, or state-owned enterprises (SOE), have seen massive job loss. As reported in *The Christian Science Monitor*, by 2002, the Chinese government estimated that at least 24 million of the country's 80 million SOE workers had lost their jobs as the state sold off firms to private interests. Some of these workers found new work, sometimes in the same workplace, under short-term contracts with a dramatic reduction in wages and benefits. Others find themselves out of work with little protection.

Who are the Migrant Workers?

The tens of millions of workers migrating in search of work are mostly young, aged 15 to 34 years. Over time, women have comprised a larger share of workers, particularly in light-manufacturing work in the southeast.

The numbers are astonishing. Guangzhou, in Gaungdong Province, is estimated to have about 17 million total residents, with about 7 million of those new migrants. Shenzhen, a city just across from Hong Kong, was a fishing village with fewer than 20,000 people in the 1970s. After it was designated as home of the country's first economic processing zone in 1980, the population sky-rocketed. Today, approximately 12 million people reside in the city, 7 million of whom are migrants.

Most migrants come from rural areas. China has a household registration system that many have called a form of apartheid. The system, called hukou, grants rights and privileges to citizens based on where they were born. While urban residents were entitled to a range of benefits, those from rural areas are not allowed to move into cities without employment papers, similar to the guest-worker program in the US. These rural residents do not have access to health care or housing in the cities, and do not have the right to send children to the schools. The system is changing somewhat, due to pressure from immigration and also a weakening of the rights of the urban population. Still, migrant workers face discrimination.

The migrants are working to escape rural poverty and to send money back home. All accounts suggest that the conditions of work are quite poor. Workers toil long hours with few breaks, and often many days without a day off. Wages are low and, while there has been some improvement in the minimum wage, it is nowhere near what is needed to keep up with the rapidly rising cost of living. Most workers live in dorms, with many people to a room. Often, the dorms lack adequate hot water and the food quality is poor. The rapid pace of work leads to injuries and sometimes death on the job.

Gender Discrimination

Free marketeers argue that the private sector has brought wealth to China and new opportunities for Chinese workers. And while many Marxists would agree that capitalism can be a positive force in terms of wealth creation, there is some evidence that conditions for women as a whole are deteriorating in many respects. Studies suggest that the Chinese Communist Party had made great strides in incorporating women into the labour market and reducing gender wage differences. However, with the development of the private sector, Chinese women appear to be experiencing increasing discrimination in hiring and in pay. There is greater industrial and occupational segregation in the private sector, and women migrants tend to receive lower wages than male migrants. Women workers frequently suffer sexual harassment from supervisors, but feel trapped: if they leave their job, they are not legally entitled to

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remain in the city. Yet they might be reluctant to return to their village where they have less independence and may be expected to marry.

Workers Organize

The harsh working conditions and labour market churning have led to an increase in worker organization. China's official trade union federation—the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU)—is the largest trade union in the world, with over 130 million members (about the size of the entire US labor force). The ACFTU is affiliated with the Chinese government, and workers do not have the right to independent unions. However, some observers point out that, given the massive size of the ACFTU, there is variation in how it functions. In a few cases, ACFTU officials at lower levels have supported workers' organizing efforts. Jude Howell, a British researcher, even finds evidence of an increasing number of direct elections for union leaders within ACFTU unions.

In addition, while the ACFTU had primarily existed within SOEs, they are increasingly looking to organize workers in the private sector. A few years ago their efforts to organize Wal-mart in China failed. Although labour law says that all workers have the right to union representation, Wal-Mart lawyers cleverly challenged the ACFTU's attempt to establish a union, noting that the law requires that workers themselves make the request. The ACFTU responded through an organizing campaign that initially looked similar to US-style organizing, with labour organizers talking to workers after hours, and building support for a unionization drive. After this approach succeeded in the first few Wal-Mart stores, the ACFTU negotiated with the company and government and, within a few months, all 60 Wal-mart stores in the country were unionized.

Beyond official trade union activity, workers are responding to poor working conditions and wages in other ways. Tim Costello, Brendan Smith and Jeremy Brecher point to numbers from the China Minister of Public Security, which show that 10 years ago, there was an average of 10,000 large scale protests per year. By 2005, there were 87,000 large-scale protests, involving more than four million workers.

WWW.ITGLWF.ORG

Members of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: over 130 million Chinese workers are represented by unions.

Workers are also trying to enforce the labour law, which was passed in 1994, and contains some important rights, such as the right to 90 days paid maternity leave and the right to grieve violations in the law. From 1997 to 2002, the number of individual labour dispute cases accepted and heard went from 72,000 to 184,000 per year, and the number of collective labour dispute cases went from 4,000 to 11,000.

Building Ties

Despite the critiques of the impact of economic reforms, we should be careful not to romanticize life for workers in pre-market China. Rewards were confined primarily to urban workers, and millions of rural workers faced extreme conditions. While great advances had been made for women in rural China, *vis-à-vis* their status prior to the revolution, strong gender roles still existed. Jobs in the cities can offer an opportunity for economic independence, social networks and autonomy, and can allow young women to put off marriage and perhaps even "compulsory heterosexuality." For this reason, western observers must avoid treating the Chinese industrial worker as a passive victim of the Chinese state and/or market forces. Pun Ngai, director of the Chinese Working Women's Network notes that the women working in southern China's manufacturing plants are not "dupes."

At the same time, the evidence seems clear that globalization has had negative impacts on Chinese workers, and current political conditions limit the opportunities workers have to organize. What can labour activists in the West do to work in solidarity with Chinese workers?

One important opportunity has developed in the past year, as China considers the passage of a new section of labour law that would provide for significant improvements in the rights of migrant and short-term contract workers. Transnational corporations have been working hard to lobby the Chinese government to reject the new proposal. Led by the American Chamber of Commerce, corporations such as UPS and Microsoft say that the new law would impose unfair restrictions on employers and force them to reconsider their investment in China. As Costello, Smith and Brecher point out, "There is no need to travel to Beijing to fight for the rights of Chinese workers. The headquarters of the corporations opposing reforms for Chinese workers are in New York and Brussels, Los Angeles and London, and other cities and towns around the world." Global capitalism must be challenged by a global working class. ★

BOLIVIA

Cochabamba challenges governor

By Paula Pfoeffer and Lee Cridland

Cochabamba is a city with a long history of struggle. In April 2000, the people stood up against the privatization of their water supply, threw out the multinational Bechtel and retook control of the local water company. In October 2003, they joined the thousands of people on the street in El Alto, La Paz and other cities to defend the right of the people to nationalize the country's gas reserves, effectively forcing then president and champion of the neo-liberal economic model, Gonzales Sanchez de Lozada, to flee the country.

Over the last few months, the citizens of the Department of Cochabamba including campesinos (farmworkers), teachers, factory workers, small merchants and coca growers, have once again taken to the streets, this time calling for the resignation of Manfred Reyes Villa, their prefect—a position similar to governor. In a so-called pro-democracy, pro-autonomy rally on December 14, 2006, Reyes Villa aligned himself with the Media Luna (the block of Eastern Departments demanding autonomy) and called for yet another referendum on the issue of autonomy, despite the fact that the same referendum was defeated by 63 percent in July 2006.

Who is Reyes Villa?

Manfred Reyes Villa is a former student of the School of the Americas in Panama. He was a student of the brutal dictator, Garcia Mesa, who has been implicated in a number of political assassinations. During his time as mayor of Cochabamba, he signed a contract with Bechtel, privatizing the city's water supply which precipitated the water wars. He was a member of the last Gonzales Sanchez de Lozada government that was responsible for killing up to 80 people during February and October 2003. In 2005, he was unexpectedly elected prefect of Cochabamba and during his 11 months in office, he has used state funds to finance a political advertising campaign which has been used to cover up his past political doings and further his own political ambitions. He owns several houses in Cochabamba and the US.

Recent Events

Reyes Villa has a longstanding history as a nefarious civic leader. In last December's public rally, he clearly aligned himself with Santa Cruz and their separatist, racist drive for autonomy. This set in motion "street democracy" with a series of protests and massive open meetings called "cabildos." As the social movements took to the streets throughout December and early January, resentment continued to grow, eventually leading to the call for Reyes Villa's resignation.

On January 8, a march on the main plaza turned into a fight between local police and protesters, and part of the municipal council building was burned. With a dozen people injured, the social movements began to march each day, demanding the resignation of Reyes Villa.

On January 11, a group of upper middle-class residents from the rich northern neighbourhoods wearing white shirts and carrying baseball bats marched to the centre of the city. This so-called "march for peace" erupted into violence when a group called Youth for Democracy broke through the police lines and began indiscriminately beating any indigenous person they could find. The "white shirts" then attempted to take the main plaza, but those in the plaza fought back. A long and violent battle that lasted well into the night resulted in two dead (one campesino and one member of Youth for Democracy) and over 200 injured. The city was in shock as images in the media of the white elite fighting the brown-skinned working class graphically illustrated the clear class and race divisions within Bolivia.

The Aftermath

Before the violence broke out on January 11, Reyes Villa left for the city of La Paz for meetings with the Governors of the Media Luna block and (many suspect) the US Embassy, making some of his supporters angry that he had deserted them. From there he flew to Santa Cruz, refusing to return to Cochabamba for fear of inciting violence, and demanding the government come to Santa Cruz to negotiate with him. In doing this, he has clearly aligned himself with the eastern states, and this may serve to anger some of his base here in Cochabamba where divisions, even among the elites, are regional.

Evo Morales returned early from his Central American tour to meet with the social movements and said that this was clearly an issue that needed to be negotiated between Cochabamba's citizens and Manfred Reyes Villa, and was not an issue for the national government. Morales talked about introducing a new law which would allow official recall votes

Paula Pfoeffer is a librarian activist who has lived in Cochabamba for almost 4 years working on literacy projects in the city. Lee Cridland has been a resident for 13 years and has worked as a human rights activist, teacher and currently coordinates a volunteer program.

of any public official, similar to the law passed in Venezuela. The Movement Toward Socialism/Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) government of Morales has repeatedly said that they will not go to Santa Cruz to negotiate with Reyes Villa, that Cochabamba's problem must be negotiated in Cochabamba.

Racism, Class and Autonomy

The push towards autonomy in the Media Luna states is steeped in racism. These states hold the vast natural resources recently nationalised by the Morales government, and most of the economic wealth. The divisions between class and race were no clearer than in Cochabamba on the afternoon of January 11. The white-shirted Manfred supporters were mostly mestizo (mixed indigenous and European ancestry) middle- and upper-class people, whereas the social movements represent the working class, peasants and poor.

The history of Bolivia is one of exploitation. From the Spanish Invasion and the use of slave labour in the mines in Potosi 400 years ago, to the neoliberal policies of previous governments, indigenous people have been exploited and excluded from wealth and power for over 500 years. The election of Evo Morales in December 2005 was a turning point in the history of Bolivia, yet most elites (many of whom gained their wealth through government corruption) cannot accept that their "right to rule" is over.

The Media Luna block are fermenting divisions between departments, with their political speeches, their open racism towards President Morales and their unwillingness to share the wealth with the rest of the country.

MAS and the Social Movements

For some time now, an interesting dynamic between MAS and the social movements has been developing. There are those social movements aligned with the government, such as the cocaleros (coca leaf growers) and some who identify themselves as autonomous such as the Coalition in Defence of Water and Life, The Landless Movement (MST) and various non-aligned community-based movements. Some accuse the government of co-opting social movements to keep criticism of the government to a minimum.

WWW.UPSIDEDOWNWORLD.ORG

Man killed by facsists being carried by comrades.

During the cabildo on January 15, the social movements of Cochabamba elected a popular prefect and its council. The MAS government has come out and said that they do not support this decision as it is not supported by the constitution and is undemocratic. A party which was once at the front line of the struggle has now become a voice for the system. While Morales and his government are pushing along with some reforms which benefit the people, such as free universal health care, financial support for education and literacy programs, they are also allowing the Right to still dictate the way they govern.

January 18 was the first anniversary of Evo Morales' inauguration as Bolivia's first indigenous president. While the hope and excitement of that day is not forgotten, a lot of reflection needs to take place. Perhaps even Evo himself needs to remember that his presidency is the direct result of a people's democracy that is made in the streets. His recent condemnation of that very process in Cochabamba has many people concerned as to which road the government will take this year. It remains to be seen whether they are going to placate other interests rather than listening to the people and their own base.

In Cochabamba, like Oaxaca, Mexico, the people are standing up against corruption and oppression. It is the people of these cities who serve as an inspiration to those of us who are living in the world of Stephen Harper and George Bush. ★

Postscript: Recently, Reyes Villa travelled to the USA to meet with Human Rights groups (most notably the right wing Human Rights Watch [HRW]) to ask them to investigate the abuses which occurred in January. Whether HRW and other groups actually investigate properly remains to be seen as Reyes Villa attempts to clean up his image and lay the blame for the violence on other people.

BOOK REVIEW

Troops Out Now!

Bleeding Afghanistan

by Sonali Kolhatkar and James Ingalls
New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006

Reviewed by Harold Lavender

Canadian troops may be fighting in Afghanistan, but (war propaganda aside) many of us know little of the real history and impact of foreign intervention. Bleeding Afghanistan: Washington, Warlords and the Propaganda of Silence is therefore a work very much worth reading.

This 2006 work by Sonali Kolhatkar and James Ingalls, coordinators of the US non-profit Afghan Women's Mission, is rooted in the experience of the Afghani women's movement, especially the Revolutionary Women's Association of Afghanistan (RAWA). The book opposes the role of imperialism, warlordism and Islamic fundamentalism. Instead, it raises the urgent need for a democratic and secular (though not anti-Islamic) society that respects and promotes women's rights.

It does an excellent job of exposing the huge gulf between imperial rhetoric and the reality of women's lives in Afghanistan. The authors thoroughly dismantle the notion (peddled even by some liberal feminists) that the occupation has made major gains in liberating Afghani women. The work is thoroughly grounded in the tragic history of Afghanistan, especially the ongoing warfare that has engulfed and destroyed the country over the last 30 years.

The authors are also sharply critical of the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and the indefensible methods used to maintain the occupation. But the book is primarily a critique of the role of US imperialism and the terrible consequences of Washington's pursuit of its own self-interest via alliances with Islamic fundamentalist forces and warlords.

Today, some propagandists paint Washington as defending civilization against Islamic "terrorism." But Bleeding Afghanistan breaks the mainstream propaganda of silence and exposes a very different reality and advances a detailed, well organized body of evidence to show the dark side of imperialist intervention in Afghanistan.

US Role

The initial section of the book shows how US policy between 1979 and 2001 helped destroy the Afghani state. The US materially backed the Mujahideen warlord forces to defeat the Soviet Union. These groups used widespread terror, including much directed at women, and later engaged in vicious civil war among themselves. Many war crimes were committed and many thousands were killed in Kabul between 1992 and 1996. But this terrible devastation was virtually ignored in the corporate media.

The following section examines why and how the US effected regime change in Afghanistan. The authors argue that Iraq was the main target of US neo-cons, but that

Afghanistan was targeted for deliberative punitive action following 9/11. A success in Afghanistan was viewed as a necessary stepping stone to the invasion of Iraq.

Over 3,000 civilians were killed in US bombing. It was the beginning of a long litany of US abuses, including torture and the militarization of aid as a tool of counter-insurgency warfare. The US was able to drive the Taliban (whose takeover they did not initially oppose) out with the aid of the well funded and armed Northern Alliance. In doing so, the US made an alliance with armed warlords. Their previous atrocious human rights records and war crimes were confidently ignored.

The US also found and made their own man, Hamid Karzai, whom they manoeuvred to the forefront as interim President. But the power of warlords and Islamic fundamentalists (from local dictates to Sharia law and the courts) was not challenged. Warlords stole and controlled land, grabbed revenues at checkpoints, stole humanitarian aid and engaged in massive narcotics trafficking. Afghanistan is today the world's largest supplier of heroin.

The warlords and their allies came to dominate both houses of what the authors dubbed "a parliament of vultures."

According to the authors, most Afghans, devastated by years of war, were initially grudgingly prepared to tolerate the occupation. However, promises of greater security and well-being have not materialized, and odious US tactics have helped drive a significant sector (perhaps 30 per cent, far broader than the Taliban) to support resistance.

Illusory Conclusions

The book has real merit. However, it disappointments sharply from an anti-imperialist perspective when it tackles the thorny question of solidarity and activist perspectives. Not surprisingly, given the weakness of the US and Afghan left, the authors fall deep into lesser-evil politics.

Kolhatkar and Ingalls have an excellent critique of the US role in Afghanistan, providing an analysis of Washington geo-political motives. And they do look to end the occupation, but not until the security situation improves. Currently, they argue, the US presence is still needed. And they call for an increase in international security forces.

In reality, the security situation under the occupation is unravelling. Canadians were told our forces would be peacekeepers. Now it is absolutely clear they are war-makers in an escalating conflict. The anti-war movement should certainly not shy away from demanding Canadian Troops Out Now! ★

Harold Lavender is an editor for New Socialist

TIME TO ORGANIZE

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

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2005 BC teachers' strike: See Which way forward for the union movement? pp. 5-10.

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