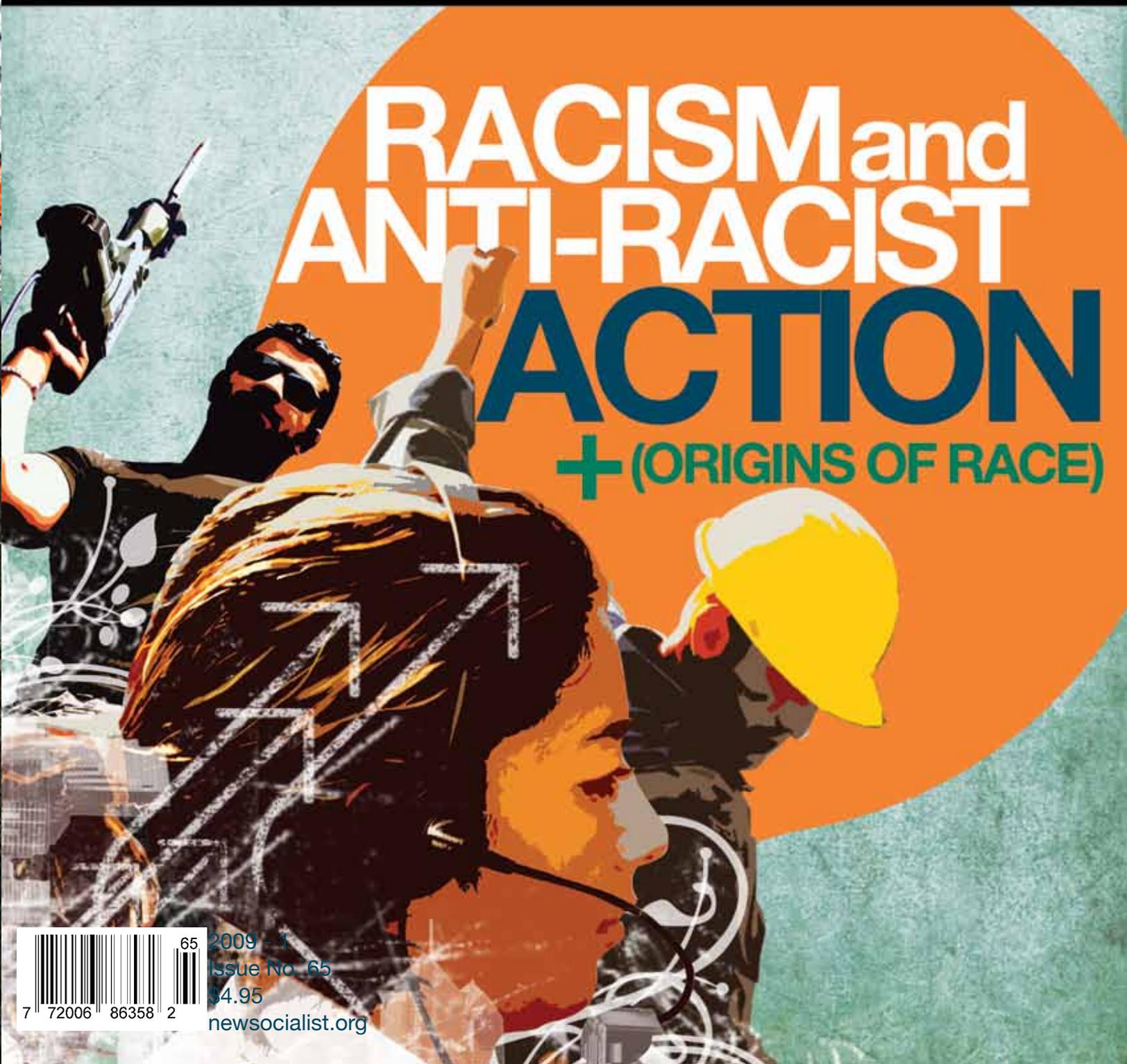


Obama, Race and Class

new★ SOCIALIST

IDEAS FOR RADICAL CHANGE

RACISM and ANTI-RACIST ACTION + (ORIGINS OF RACE)



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FROM THE EDITORS

Anti-racism and the global economic crisis

AS THIS SPECIAL THEME ISSUE OF *NEW SOCIALIST* GOES to press in March 2009, the global economic crisis continues to deepen. The next issue of *New Socialist* will focus on radical responses to the crisis, offering resources for resistance. This issue – produced by a special team of regular and guest editors – is devoted to the theme of racism and anti-racism.

The first truly global slump since the early 1980s is not just a financial crisis that has seen perhaps ten *trillion* dollars (15 percent of world GDP) pumped into shoring up banks and other financial institutions. It is also a crisis for firms that produce goods and services. As profits decline, employers are making layoffs on a massive scale and often rolling back the wages and conditions of those who remain. From high-waged auto workers in the US and Canada to low-paid workers in the export manufacturing industries of South and East Asia, people everywhere are feeling the impact of capitalism's crisis.

One of the many effects of the global slump will be the intensification of racism and of hostility against immigrants.

As insecurity gets worse and competition for jobs grows, many people blame those not born in the countries where they are now living for supposedly “stealing” jobs and housing from citizens and being a “burden” on social services. Although this kind of response is common, it is not natural. It comes from living in a world organized into a system of states, each of which grants its citizens rights that are denied to non-citizens. States also cultivate nationalism, encouraging people to think of themselves as different from – and better than – people living within the borders of other states.

The targeting of immigrants is a global threat. Recent years have seen, for example, violent attacks on Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa and the mass deportation from South Korea of non-status Filipino workers. But in Europe and the states founded by European settler colonialism – the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – it is combined with deep-rooted racism against indigenous peoples and people of colour.

In Canada, the Tory federal government is considering

reducing the number of people admitted as permanent residents. Migrant workers who are working in Canada under the Temporary Foreign Worker program are particularly vulnerable to layoffs, since when they lose their jobs they must apply for another work permit or leave the country.

In the UK, a Labour government slogan – “British jobs for British workers” – has been picked up by some UK-born people, fuelling both racism and hostility against white migrant workers from other states in the European Union. With the immigration minister making statements like “It’s been too easy to get into this country in the past and it’s going to get harder,” it’s clear to see how governments are fanning the flames of racism.

We can expect to see this pattern repeated as the global crisis deepens.

In short, the global slump makes anti-racism *even more important*, not something to be downplayed in the name of a fake “unity” against bailouts, layoffs and cutbacks. Racism always needs to be fought for its own sake, because it is a form of oppression. It is also true that efforts by unions and community organizations to defend people from the impact of the economic crisis and mobilize against employers and governments will not go far if they do not challenge racism directly.

We hope this publication will provide readers with ideas that will help to understand and combat racism, whether by supporting the struggles for self-determination of indigenous peoples, mobilizing for justice for migrants, challenging Israel’s oppression of Palestinians, or responding to racism in the media and in toys for children. In addition to articles on those topics, we offer analysis that grapples with the relationship between racism and capitalism, with the significance of the election of an African-American as the head of state of the world’s top imperialist power, with the history of racism in the US and Canada, and with other issues that are relevant to anyone who wants to act against racism. We hope you will take what you read into efforts to fight racism individually and, most importantly, collectively – in the movements for radical change we so urgently need to be building today. ★

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

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New Socialist magazine welcomes debate. Letters will be printed on our website. We encourage readers to submit articles engaging with the ideas put forth in our pages for publication either in print or on our website. Please send to the address or e-mail address above.

CAPITALISM AND RACIAL OPPRESSION

An historical look at what Marxist theory brings to the struggle to end racism

BY DAVID McNALLY

IN THE MIDST OF TODAY'S PROFOUND ECONOMIC CRISIS, many people on the Left are turning to Marxist political economy to make sense of events. Yet, while Marxist economic analysis is enjoying something of a renaissance, the same cannot be said for analyses of racism that work on the terrain of Marx's theory of capitalism. In fact, there is a powerful reluctance in many quarters to seriously explore racism as a phenomenon that is bound up with the class relations of capitalism.

This reluctance stems from at least two causes. First, over the years, many Marxists have advanced remarkably crude theories of racism, treating it as largely a reflex of capitalist economic relations. Race, after all, is a complex phenomenon with social, cultural and psychological dimensions, not merely economic ones. Furthermore, crude Marxist theories have little capacity to account for why so many white working class people participate in racist practices.

In addition to this problem, there is the fact that, in academic and many activist circles over the past 25 years, a variety of "post-modern" social theories have held sway. What postmodern approaches share is the idea that language – or "discourse" – drives social life, rather than the social practices involved in reproducing our material existence.

Rather than seeing racism as an historical product of specific forms of social life, postmodern theory tends to understand it as an inherent feature of any and every culture. Since, according to many postmodernists, every language and culture inevitably involves groups of people defining themselves – constructing their identi-

ties – in opposition to other groups, all cultural systems *other* someone or some group.

For radical socialists, of course, such an outlook will not do. Committed as we are to a radically *emancipatory* politics – a politics of thoroughgoing liberation from all forms of oppression – the idea that racism will always be with us is deeply problematic. Furthermore, there is a powerful body of evidence to show that modern racism emerged with the rise of capitalism. And, if racism as we know it developed only under particular social and historical circumstances, it follows that it can, at least in principle, be eliminated.

Since this assessment runs against the grain of so much thinking today, it is best that we spend some time making the case. My approach to the issues will be largely historical and will draw on some of the most thoughtful work by Marxist theorists and historians addressed to issues of race and racism.



From Frank Leslie's *Popular Monthly*, April 1880, collection of Maggie Land Blanck: *Fuel For The School Fire*, County Mayo. Irish children attended secret Hedge schools, often held in caves, barns or behind hedges as the Penal Laws made it illegal for Catholics to teach about Irish heritage.

IRISH, INDIANS AND ORIGINS OF RACIAL OPPRESSION

IN SEPTEMBER OF 1880, A writer in the *Times of London* commented that the largest English newspapers "allow no occasion to escape them of treating the Irish as an inferior race – as a kind of white negroes." This observation ought to make us pay close attention to how race and racism are historically constructed. After all, the Irish eventually became white – they were admitted to the ranks of the racially dominant group, earlier in America, perhaps, than in Britain. But for a long time they were explicitly judged to be non-white.

When Britain conquered Ireland in the second half of the 17th century, Irish Catholics were evicted from their lands. A series of statutes were passed, known as the Penal

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Laws, that forbade Irish Catholics from voting, sitting in parliament, possessing arms, operating schools, attending university or practicing law. A virtual system of apartheid was created. Tens of thousands of Irish men were sold by British adventurers to foreign armies for use as soldiers, or as indentured servants to plantation owners in Virginia and elsewhere.

But English colonizers faced a problem: how could they justify treating fellow Christians this way?

They solved this problem with a cunning ideological move, claiming that, because they were not civilized, the Irish could not be Christians. To “prove” the point, a whole series of racist stereotypes were constructed depicting the Irish as licentious, incestuous, and pagan – as savages. In representing the Irish in these terms, English writers drew freely on Spanish justifications for murder and pillage against native peoples in the Americas.

RACE, CAPITALISM AND UNFREE LABOUR

THE IRISH EXPERIENCE PROVIDES AN IMPORTANT CONFIRMATION of the pioneering argument made by the Trinidadian historian Eric Williams in his landmark book, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944). Arguing that slavery must be understood principally as a social-economic institution out of which racism grows, Williams wrote: “Slavery in the Caribbean has been too narrowly identified with the Negro. A racial twist has thereby been given to what is basically an economic phenomenon. Slavery was not born of racism; racism was born of slavery. Unfree labor in the New World was brown, white, black and yellow; Catholic, Protestant and pagan.”

Williams’ argument, while one-sided in some respects, contains a profound truth: that unfree labour in the Americas was not initially based upon race. At its beginnings, bonded labour in the Americas was, as Williams says, “brown, white, black and yellow.”

For more than 150 years, over half of the white emigrants to North America came as indentured servants. These labourers were bound to a master for a defined period of time, typically five to seven years. Considered property in law, indentured servants were not legal subjects. Their masters had the right to beat, maim and even kill them. Typically, their status did not differ considerably from that of black slaves. They could not marry without permission and they could be sold, put up as stakes in bets, inherited, or used to pay debts.

For these reasons, Williams claimed that the origin of black slavery “had to do not with the color of the laborer, but the cheapness of the labor.”

At this stage in history, differences in skin colour did not

yet map onto the distinction between the free and the unfree. The Americas knew both unfree whites and free blacks. But a key problem for the colonial elites in the Americas – control of the labouring class – eventually forced them to choose a strategy of racial domination. The result would be new forms of oppression whose wretched effects continue to shape the world in which we live.

THE EMERGENCE OF WHITE SUPREMACY

AS THEODORE W. ALLEN SHOWS IN HIS MAJOR STUDY, *THE Invention of the White Race*, racialized slavery emerged as the ruling elite’s solution to disciplining rebellious groups of white servants, Indians and black slaves that populated the Anglo-American colonies.

The essential problem for the plantation owners had to do with the rebellious culture of the lower classes. In Virginia in the 1660s, for instance, the mixed “rabble” of the lower classes – “an amalgam of indentured servants and slaves, of poor whites and blacks, of landless freemen and debtors,” as one historian puts it – regularly resisted the violence and oppression of unfree labour. On occasion, this resistance could pass over into insurrection as it did most memorably in 1676.

Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676 was the largest popular upheaval in the history of colonial America. Of 15,000 participants in the tumultuous events, a majority were bond-labourers – 2,000 African-Americans and 6,000 European-Americans. These well-armed rebels plundered property, demanded freedom from chattel servitude and set the capital ablaze. In the

process, the royal governor and his entourage were sent into hiding.

Determined to eliminate the threat of revolution from below, the owners devised a new system of social control. Seeking a buffer group from the lower classes that could reinforce the established order, they relaxed the servitude of white labourers, intensified the bonds of black slavery and introduced a new regime of racial oppression.

From about 1660, a steady stream of legislation sought to separate black and white servants and to prevent “mixed” marriages and the procreation of “mixed-race” children – a crime known as miscegenation. Increasingly, colonial law imposed lifetime bondage for black servants and their offspring. (Prior to 1660, many black servants appear not to have been indentured for life.) Central to this process was political disenfranchisement: the denial of the right to vote which most Anglo-American colonies had previously granted to free blacks.

In these ways, a system of white supremacy and black in-

A key problem for the colonial elites in the Americas – control of the labouring class – eventually forced them to choose a strategy of racial domination.

feriority was constructed in which freedom was increasingly identified with race, not class. White supremacy was thus meant to give white workers a “racial stake” in the system. And a new mental universe – the ideology of modern racism – was constructed as an inherent part of this process.

COLONIAL CAPITALISM AND THE INVENTION OF RACE

THE CLAIM THAT MODERN RACISM EMERGED IN ANGLO-America largely as a strategy for capitalist control of the labouring class is often met with disbelief. After all, prejudices toward outsiders and foreigners have existed throughout different human societies across many historical periods. Yet, only in the era of modern capitalism do we get the idea that there are *physically distinct races* of humans with radically different characteristics and attributes.

In ancient Greece and Rome, for instance, bondage was not associated with skin colour or physical appearance. Similarly, while both Islamic and Christian societies condoned slavery, it was not justified on the basis of colour. In fact, for both cultures, persecuted individuals could lose their oppressed status by religious conversion. Only in the era of modern capitalism did persecution get accounted for in terms of inherent and unchangeable features – the “race” – of a specific group.

What was it, then, about the development of capitalism that gave rise to modern racial ideology?

The key issue here is the contradiction generated by capitalist claims for “freedom.” In its inception, capitalism often mobilized large groups of people to break down pre-capitalist forms of power and privilege. After all, the feudal system of political titles and offices granted by monarchs often kept capitalists excluded from the inner circles of power.

To break down their exclusion from important realms of property and privilege, bourgeois representatives invoked ideas of freedom and equality. They opposed hereditary rights, preferring market power to hereditary power. But if everyone is allegedly free and equal, what could justify chattel slavery? How could some people be deprived of freedom and equality in a society that claims these ideals? Only by arguing that certain groups were not in fact

human, could their un-freedom be defended.

As bondage became fixed on Africans in 18th-century America, the concept of race was created. Previously, European-Americans had not described themselves as white. As a rule, they referred to themselves in terms of nationality – as Englishmen or Spaniards, for example – or with reference to religion – as Christians. The appellation *white* was still quite rare. Yet, by the early 18th century, that term was occurring with some frequency.

And such talk was dressed up with scientific-sounding claims. Methods associated with the natural sciences were distorted to “prove” the inherent differences among various “races” of humans. Anatomical differences and skin colours were now linked to fundamental differences in moral character. And the rights appropriate to humans were said not to apply to the “sub-human” species.

These racist ideas became a centrepiece of the age of empire in the 19th and 20th centuries, as European powers conquered huge chunks of the planet and tens of millions of people who lived there.

THE WAGES OF WHITENESS

RACISM IS THUS A SOCIAL-HISTORICAL CREATION, NOT something eternal. But this powerful insight still begs an important question. After all, racism is not *only* something imposed from above; it is not *merely* a conspiracy of the powerful. It is also a social relation perpetuated in and

through the activities of most white people. Racism could not have had its durability unless large numbers of working class peoples in Europe and North America had been invested in seeing themselves as “white.”

This dimension of racism, its power of attraction for white workers, was brilliantly analyzed by the historian W.E.B. Du Bois in a famous passage in his book, *Black Reconstruction in America*. Explaining the widespread racism of poor whites in the US South, Du Bois wrote:

“It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of



Cane cutters: slaves from Africa in the Caribbean

white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks . . .”

Du Bois’ notion of public and psychological wages – the *wages of whiteness*, as historian David Roediger puts it – directs our attention to the role of white supremacy in affording exploited white workers a sort of subjective compensation for their inferior economic status. Smarting from their treatment as degraded wage-labourers, white workers are allowed to bask in the significantly better treatment they receive in public places, before the police and courts, in schools and job interviews, and as members of the dominant cultural group. We can see the attractions and pathologies of whiteness at work in the case of the Irish in America.

The millions who left Ireland for America – as indentured servants or economic refugees – were not only poor, they were also members of a despised and ostracized group. So oppressed were the Irish, so ghettoized into the most dangerous jobs, that on average they lived six years after their arrival in America.

Furthermore, the Irish had closer personal relations with African-Americans than did any other group at the time. Blacks and Irish often lived together in squalid apartments. In cities like New York and Boston into the 1830s, the majority of “mixed” couples involved Irish women and black men. This was the context in which the Irish were often referred to as “white negroes,” or “niggers turned inside out.” Indeed, some commentators argued that the Irish were part of a “dark” race, one that had probably originated in Africa. To racists, it made perfect sense to target both blacks and Irish, as rioting whites did in Boston in 1829.

As racism was reorganized in the middle of the 19th century – a result of the intensification of industrial capitalism in the US North – the Irish found that social advancement might be possible if they could stake a claim to whiteness and respectability. This was no easy matter. In contrast to many other “white” immigrant groups, Irish Catholics had not had generations of cultural adjustment to the “Protestant work ethic” – the exacting disciplines of industrial labour and the repression of sexuality, recreation and festivity that accompany them. Like others who came from societies that retained elements of non-capitalist cultural life, Irish Catholics

were considered unruly, dirty, lazy, rebellious and lascivious.

RACISM AND INTERNAL REPRESSION

IN ORDER FOR THE IRISH IN 19TH-CENTURY AMERICA TO claim whiteness and respectability, they were driven to intensify the internal psychic repression that is integral to industrial capitalism – the subordination of desires for recreation, drink, festivity, sex and social celebration to employers’ demands for a sober, industrious and disciplined workforce. Yet, as invariably happens, severe internal repression involves projection. Seeking respectability, the Irish projected onto

blacks the very characteristics they strove to repress in themselves. As Frantz Fanon noted about this phobia: “The civilized white man retains an irrational longing for unusual eras of sexual license . . . Projecting his own desires onto the Negro, the white man behaves ‘as if’ the Negro really had them.”

Thus, racist psychology nurtures powerful desires to reclaim the very things – joy, festivity, sexual license – that

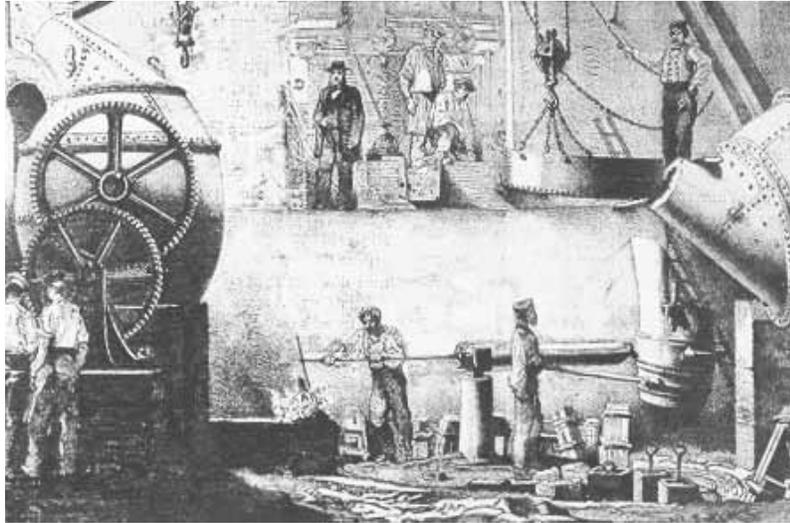


Illustration of factory scene from early days of industrialization.

capitalism and imperialism deny. It seethes with resentment. Because whiteness comes at such a great psychological cost, it can assume pathological and violent dimensions. And the desires it represses reappear – in racist projections – as larger than life, as monstrously destructive.

At the heart of racism, therefore, is a profound anxiety (often related to sexuality), a fear among whites that they too might be identified as outsiders to civilization – as black. Such identifications are allowed small outlets today – in sports and music, for instance – only so that they can be more effectively controlled.

But for anti-racist and socialist movements, understanding *both* the economic and psychological roots of racism involves two things. First, it means seeing racism as historically created and thus eliminatable. And, second, it means understanding that we need to organize simultaneously against the economic conditions that foster racism *and* against the ideologies and practices of white supremacy that distort our humanity and block working class people from discovering their common interests and their necessary solidarity. It means, in short, being unconditionally and simultaneously anti-racist and anti-capitalist. ★

ANTI-RACISM GLOSSARY

THE FOLLOWING IS ABRIDGED FROM A LONGER GLOSSARY BY HEIDI MEHTA.

Colonialism: Foreign occupation and domination of indigenous peoples and their resources. Canada is a colonial country in which racism has been used to justify theft of native land.

Multiculturalism: Should mean that all cultures co-exist but it is an ideology devoid of an analysis of power. Canada is portrayed as a tolerant, multicultural society, but excludes racialized communities from the national narrative and was built by an exploited, racialized labour force.

Race: Socially constructed grouping of people, based on political and economic status without biological basis. For example, under South Africa's apartheid laws, the Japanese were considered "Black" until they became economically powerful and were considered "White."

White privilege/white supremacy: Historically- based, institutionally perpetuated system of advantage into which people are born based on having white skin. For example, the reasonable accommodation debate in Quebec is white supremacist, as it is based on the assumption that white people are the standard to which all cultures must assimilate.

Racism: A system of economic, social, political and cultural oppression based on race. It includes attitudes and actions that disadvantage people of colour, regardless of intent, due to the power imbalance inherent to systems of oppression.

Racialization: Process whereby groups are given racial markings depending on changing socio-political and economic

conditions, rather than biology. Laws distinguished Irish servants from black slaves to divide people by race so that they would not align themselves in class solidarity.

Systemic racism: Institutional practices that directly or indirectly maintain white dominance, a historical example of which is the Chinese Head Tax.

Racial stereotyping: Negative categorizations about disempowered groups, such as security guards that harass non-white youth because they are all seen as troublemakers.



Prejudice: Bias based on stereotypes. The judge who convicted Mumia Abu-Jamal was known to be prejudiced against black people, for example.

Discrimination: Practice of exclusion based on prejudice, such as refusing to hire a worker wearing a hijab.

Xenophobia: Fear of certain racialized groups; attempts to ban the kirpan, for example, are rooted in xenophobia.

Scapegoating: Blaming a group for a problem to deflect attention from the cause.

Commonsense racism: Term used by Himani Bannerji that describes "normalized" racism. The exclusion of migrant live-in caregivers from the Labour Standards Act, for example, is used to justify their second-class status.

Internalized racism: The violence of oppression is that it replicates within oppressed people, thus the global popularity of light-skinned Bollywood actors.

Reverse racism: Term devoid of an analysis of power used to undermine anti-racism initiatives. Teaching black history, for example, is not reverse racism since white history dominates the history taught in schools.

Tokenism: False inclusion without challenging power or changing root practices. For example, in a union, people of colour may be portrayed on publicity, yet only white people may be hired as organizers.

Cultural appropriation: Selectively taking parts of a culture for use or profit, such as the recent bindi fashion fad that appropriates South Asian culture and voids it of cultural significance.

People of colour: Although homogenizing, it is a term for non-white people united by a common experience of racism.

Passing: Ability to appear as a member of the dominant group. For example light-skinned people may, sometimes, be accepted in the dominant white society.

Ally: Person who actively challenges their privilege to end oppression. White people must work in solidarity with people of colour as anti-racist allies.

Intersecting oppressions: Dynamic of living multiple oppressions, for example an out lesbian of colour may face choosing between culture and community when seeking support. ★

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Slavery, settlement and rebellion

How race was made in British North America

BY DAVE ROEDIGER

Nearly a century ago, US civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois captured how uneasily modern racism sits within the longer run of world history. “The discovery of personal whiteness among the world’s peoples,” he wrote, “is a very modern thing.” Du Bois continued by adding, “The ancient world would have laughed at such a distinction,” and by further noting that, in the Middle Ages, skin colour would have provoked nothing more than “mild curiosity.” Du Bois was, characteristically, right. As late as the beginning of the 17th century, even male western European elites – those whose enterprises would create race in the modern sense – did not see themselves as physically white, and were still further from imagining that the word “white” had uses as a noun.

Insofar as Du Bois gives clues as to how he dated the transition to modern racism in what would become the US, his math takes us back to the series of rebellions in mid- and late-17th century Virginia. Recent historians agree, identifying the central such conflict, Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676, as a turning point. It marked the start of an increased importing of African slaves as well as the creation of racial division as a strategy of class rule pursued by elites who were shaken by the 1676 demands of European and African rebels.

This brief article tells such a story of the origins of race but complicates it by emphasizing that settler colonialism ensured that white supremacy developed by identifying American Indians as well as African slaves as racial outsiders and victims. Indeed even the interracial rebels joining Bacon saw settler colonialism as part of the solution to their class problems.

Earlier Europeans did at times note differences between their skin colours and those of non-Europeans, but the idea of “personal whiteness” – something that could be owned as an asset and as an identity – was surely a “very modern thing.” Though influenced by the ways

that anti-Semitism, anti-Islamic crusading and the conquest of Ireland created “others” against whom a “Christian Europe” and its various empires could begin to fashion themselves, personal whiteness would have to await the slave trade and the settler-colonial conquest of indigenous peoples in the Americas. The notion that one could own a skin colour – what the legal scholar Cheryl Harris calls “whiteness as property” – came into being alongside the reality that, increasingly, only peoples who were defined by their colour could be owned and sold as slaves. It matured alongside the equally brutal notion that land on which the suddenly “nonwhite” peoples lived would be better managed by “white” people.

CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS

Reflecting both the gains of the civil rights movement, and that movement’s need for hopeful lessons from history, post-World War 2 historians saw a 17th century colonial world in which “race relations” were less than hierarchical and fixed. At their best, these accounts joined Du Bois in challenging assumptions about the existence of race relations throughout much of human history. Especially in studying early Virginia, historians showed that the bloody logic of premising a system of production on the sweat of slaves, and anchoring a system



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W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963): “The discovery of personal whiteness among the world’s peoples is a very modern thing.”

of social control to the loyalty of poor whites, took time to develop. So did, in their modern senses, the very categories of black and white.

Written mainly in the shadow of an anti-Nazi war and during the modern civil rights movement, the historical literature on the turn from indentured servitude of Europeans and Africans to the slavery of the latter group as a basis for plantation agriculture in North America has carried the political point that racism is anything but natural. Nor was the idea of “race” separable from the actual social practices of white supremacy contained in plantation slavery and the dispossession of the Indians. The historical literature on the rise of race in colonial Virginia uproots the reactionary common sense idea that races exist outside of historical circumstances. It locates the rise of personal whiteness squarely in the material realities of class division and class rule.

What happened in Virginia shows

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that white supremacy did not arise as a result of agitation, or even sentiment, among poor whites desiring to preserve and extend social distance between themselves and Africans. Rather than being an expression of white unity and common interest, the turn to racial slavery was a response to sharp class divisions among settlers and sought to create an ersatz unity among whites, by creating “white” itself as a social and legal category.

As the early centre of African slavery in British North America and the cradle of revolutionary leaders and presidents, Virginia has been the focus for those wanting to understand how a social system could suddenly be built around the idea of “whiteness.” Detailed accounts of the early history of the colony by such leading scholars as Edmund Morgan and Oscar Handlin show that there existed at the outset only vague distinctions between black and white, and between servant and slave. Though Virginia was anything but egalitarian in its treatment of the Indians and in its labour policies, it nevertheless connected the concepts of slavery and race only gradually. Its early African labourers sometimes worked for a term of service alongside similarly indentured Europeans. Black and white indentured servants shared alcohol, death, escapes, sex, and marriage across the “colour line” or rather before it. The gendered dimensions of this history are brilliantly charted by Jennifer Morgan, Kathleen Brown and others.

Indeed during the first quarter-



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Virginia was the early centre of African slavery in British North America.

century of Virginian settler colonialism, life expectancy was so dire, and female servants were so few, that in many cases there was little practical point in insisting that Africans and their descendants be enslaved for life. Moreover, Africans constituted relatively few of the colony’s workers. As the colony matured, however, life expectancy grew longer and child mortality diminished, and attempts to define Africans and their children as slaves for life increased. This development coincided with the increasing determination in Europe that enslavement of Europeans ought not to occur while African slavery could. However, in the colonies, the situation remained fluid a half-century after the first permanent Virginia settlement. Patterns of sociability, love and resistance continued to bring together Africans and Europeans. Some Africans acquired land and, along with it, the confidence to insist on their rights, including the right to command the labour of others. Race, as a series of post-1660 rebellions would show, had little firm meaning in such a land of flux, force and death.

Although, as Edmund Morgan argues, labourers in early colonial Virginia were brutally exploited – on the rationale that they were “selected for that purpose” from among those deemed “useless” in Europe – many of them refused to live within such limits. They resisted servitude and came to regard grueling work in the colonies as a prelude to, and a claim on, future landowning prosperity. As a result, in the two decades from the 1661 Servants’ Plot – when indentured servants rose up in a rebellion over inadequate food rations – to the tobacco riots of 1682 – when cutters and pluckers destroyed their crops and those of neighbors to protest overproduction – at least 10 popular revolts shook Virginia. Like everyday life among the poor, insurrections brought together Africans and Europeans.

BACON’S REBELLION

The most spectacular example of revolt, Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676, took Virginia to the brink of civil war. Broadly arising from the desire for good land among European and African servants and ex-servants, the rebellion also had anti-Indian dimensions, demanding and implementing aggressive policies to speed settlement onto indigenous lands. Bondservants, joined by those who had recently served out their time, were united under the leadership of the young English lawyer and venture capitalist Nathaniel Bacon. The rebels lay siege to the capital in Jamestown, burned it, drove Governor William

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SOCIALIST**

COMING SOON: NS66

RADICAL RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS
Resources for Resistance

The current economic crisis is rapidly changing the political map. It has shaken the confidence of CEOs, presidents and prime ministers in their stock neo-liberal responses. At the same time, it has created huge challenges for activists in unions and movements faced with major attacks on trade union and immigrant rights. This issue will look at the causes of the economic crisis, its political consequences and the challenges for rebuilding the Left in these circumstances.

Berkeley into exile and sustained an insurrection for months. Authorities offered freedom “from their slavery” to “Negroes and servants” who would come over into opposition to the rebellion. Rebels meanwhile feared that they would all be made into “slaves, man, woman & child.” Both the promise of liberation and the language registering fear of retribution suggest how imperfectly class predicaments aligned with any firm sense of racial division.

WIDENING OPPRESSIONS

In coming years, elites in England and Virginia responded to threats of rebellion by committing to a system in which much more of the colony’s work fell to slave labour. and, significantly, by widening differences between the oppression of African and European labourers. With the reorganization of the Royal African Company in 1685, and with imperial authorities smiling on “a trade so beneficial to the Kingdom,” slave trading became a lynchpin of imperial policy in North America. The turn to a labour force defined by racial slavery happened with startling speed in the late 1600s. By 1709 Africans in slavery for life overwhelmingly out-

numbered Europeans held for a term in Virginia, South Carolina, and Maryland. By systematizing distinctions between Europeans and Africans, the ruling elite secured their control and, in the process, created race in its modern sense.

The grandeur and compelling political force of such a narration of the origins of race has tended to elbow out of the picture the complicating fact that settlers also fashioned themselves as “white” out of the process of confronting and dispossessing those whom the British would eventually call “red Indians.” But the skins and values of African and European labourers’ bodies cannot be the whole story of the sudden, durable rise of race-thinking in British North America. Including Indian “others” in the story of the emergence of personal whiteness forces us to see the powerful and lasting ways in which white supremacy transformed settlers’ identities by attaching itself to freedom and to ideas about gender – even in colonies without significant commitments to slave-based economies. The logic of dispossession created changes in how “whites” thought of themselves, their households and their lands, as well as how they thought of those removed from the land.

Further attention to Bacon’s Rebellion offers an opportunity to see the ways in which the gendered invention of the white race took shape around settler colonialism as well as slavery. Bacon’s July, 1676 “Declaration in the Name of the People” denounced Virginia’s Governor Berkeley for having failed to move decisively against the Native Americans, “barbarous heathen” who might have

“with ease beene destroyed.” Linking the liberty of the people to Indian removal, Bacon’s Rebellion was an interracial movement of the European and African poor, but it was never only that. Especially in its early stages, in the winter and spring of 1675 and 1676, class-based anti-colonial resistance was mobilized around demands for a more thoroughly genocidal anti-Indian policy. Rebel leaders were less willing than colonial officials to countenance even temporary alliances with peaceful tribes, and more willing to regard obscure local disputes as a cause to destroy whole peoples.

NOT SIMPLY INTERRACIAL

Yet Bacon’s Rebellion’s anti-Indian character has been somewhat eclipsed by accounts that take understandable but potentially excessive inspiration from a desire to see his rebellion as simply “interracial.” These readings often separate his initial activities, centring on anti-Indian adventures, from his nobler focus on a mobilization of the poor for civil war, if not social revolution, later in 1676 [he died in October of that year]. But his commitment to the extermination of Native Americans, the “barbarous heathen,” cannot easily be waved aside, as it positioned him to lead a movement of white indentured servants who, having worked their time, harbored dreams of freedom centred on gaining possession of vacated land.

White supremacy thus situated itself at some times in opposition to a “red” other and at others to a “black” one. It came as part of – and justification for – both settler colonialism and slavery. As such, like the expanded capitalist productive relations whose rise it fuelled and mirrored, it came into the world “dripping in blood,” to borrow Marx’s great phrase. Manifestly irrational, white supremacy also possessed ruthless logics born of its turns towards slavery and settlement. We live with those logics. ★



Painting depicts Bacon’s Rebellion: artist unknown.

ENCARTA

CANADA: A RACIST HISTORY

BY HAROLD LAVENDER

Canadian racism has its roots in white settler colonialism. Many settlers historically viewed Canada as a white nation and society, ignoring the pre-existing indigenous populations. Successive waves of immigrants settled the land. Asian immigrants settled primarily in BC while blacks settled mainly in the East. They endured a bitter history of racism.

In 1907, future-Prime Minister Mackenzie King wrote, "It is desirable, natural and necessary that Canada remains a white man's country." Immigration policies either severely limited or banned immigration of non-white groups, ensuring that immigrants would overwhelmingly be of white European origin.

In 1950, Canada's population was 98 percent white. Large-scale non-white immigration began after 1967, when changes in immigration policy introduced the current points system. Today, the population in the Canadian state is 80 per cent white and 20 percent "visible minorities" and "aboriginals."

COLONIZATION AND RACISM

European colonial empires (and what became the US) vied for control of the land. Indigenous nations were variously allies and enemies in colonial wars.

Mercantile capitalists sought to obtain furs from indigenous people to make profits. Missionaries sought to civilize the Indians and steal their souls. The pre-contact population collapsed due to diseases introduced from Europe, such as smallpox, and other consequences of colonization.

Britain's 1763 Royal Proclamation sought to regulate relations with native nations. A process of consent was required prior to settlement: "without treaty or purchase the Crown has no jurisdiction over Aboriginal people on their lands."

Harold Lavender is an editor of New Socialist.



Classroom in an Indian residential school: First opened in 1869, the last of these racist institutions did not close until 1984.

By the 1850s, the aim was to gradually civilize the "Indians" and extinguish their separate identity as a people. This policy would become fully institutionalized after Confederation. In 1867, the new Dominion of Canada engaged in a nation-building process that included aggressive settlement of the newly acquired West and the construction of a transcontinental railway. The RCMP was formed to police the northwest in 1872.

Conflict with Métis and indigenous peoples increased. The most important act of resistance was the 1885 Riel rebellion, which was crushed by large-scale military force. The Métis leader Louis Riel and eight Cree people were hanged, while 30 others received long prison sentences.

Treaties were made under which the indigenous population was confined to small land reserves that did not correspond to traditional tribal territories. The large majority of BC has never been ceded and is in effect stolen native land.

The 1876 Indian Act (and subsequent amendments) imposed a comprehensive system of racism. Power rested in the newly created Department of Indian Affairs. Traditional indigenous forms of self-government were outlawed. The only

recognized authorities were the imposed Band Councils.

The Act defined who was an Indian (Indigenous women and their descendants who married white men automatically lost status). Indigenous ceremonies and cultural traditions such as the potlatch became illegal. Indigenous groups were forbidden to raise funds to defend their rights. Aboriginal people required a pass to travel off reserves.

Non-indigenous people were permitted to develop resources on reserves. The government was supposed to put the money acquired into a trust fund, but in 1927 this \$72 million fund was liquidated into general revenues for social programs.

The main instrument of cultural genocide was the government-funded, religious-run residential schools, first opened in 1869. An amendment to the Indian Act allowed the government to forcibly remove indigenous children from their parents and place them in residential schools where a central goal was to kill the Indian in the child.

Over 100,000 children passed through the system before the last school closed. Children who spoke their own language or engaged in traditional practices were severely punished. There was severe

physical and emotional abuse and sexual abuse in the schools.

The schools were grossly underfunded, overcrowded and unsanitary. Nutrition was very poor, contributing to exceptionally high mortality rates and to the spread of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis.

The most draconian and discriminatory measures in the Indian Act gradually became unacceptable, especially after World War II, and were repealed over time. Indians on reserves won the vote in 1960.

In a 1969 white paper, then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Indian Affairs minister Jean Chrétien proposed to abolish the Indian Act. But they refused to recognize any special status or indigenous rights. Aboriginal organizations protested and blocked the changes, and later ensured that aboriginal rights sections of the 1867 British North Act were included in the repatriated Canadian Constitution.

Since then, court decisions have partially recognized and extended aboriginal rights. Government policy has centred on treaty negotiations, prioritizing areas of resource development. The goal of federal (and BC) treaty negotiators is to extinguish aboriginal title and make aboriginal government similar to municipal governments, subject to both provincial and federal authority.

The Canadian government categorically rejects the right to self-determination, including full sovereignty for indigenous nations. Defenders of the land who resist corporate capitalist and government incursions on their land continue to be repressed.

RACISM AGAINST PEOPLE OF COLOUR

Slavery in New France (which held 1,500 slaves at the time of British conquest) was not abolished until early in the nineteenth century. In the 1850s, in a brief moment of freedom, Harriet Tubman's Underground Railway led almost 1,000 escaped slaves to refuge in Canada. But instead of freedom, black communities in Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia were subject to segregation and discrimination. As late as 1939, the Supreme

Court of Canada ruled segregation was legally enforceable.

New black immigration to Canada was highly discouraged. A 1910 Order-in-Council allowed the government to refuse landing rights to any "Negro person deemed unsuitable to the climate and conditions of Canada."

Chinese people first came to Canada with the BC gold rush. In 1875, Chinese migrants were forced to pay a head tax to enter Canada. In the early 1880s, Chinese workers were imported to build the BC section of the CPR. They did the hardest and most dangerous tasks (with high rates of mortality), and were paid as little as half the wages of white workers. They were barred from voting and government employment and from many professions.

Post-1967 immigration policy does not formally discriminate on the basis of race, but is heavily tailored to the needs of the capitalist labour market.

The Anti-Asiatic exclusion league was formed in 1907 as a mass-based cross-class movement. That year, a parade (of up to 30,000) turned into a race riot, causing widespread damage in the Chinese and Japanese communities.

The 1908 Continuous Passage Act required all immigrants to arrive in Canada via a continuous journey from their point of origin. In 1914, the Komagatu Maru, carrying 376 South Asian passengers, was prevented from landing in Vancouver and left after a month's privation. From 1914 to 1920, only one Indian was able to immigrate legally to Canada.

Anti-semitism was also widespread in Canada, especially between the world wars. A 1938 memo from government officials reveals that they did not wish to take in any of the Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution although they did not want to say this publicly. As a result, Canada took fewer Jewish refugees than any other western government.

Japanese immigration was limited but never banned. In 1942, under provi-

sions of the War Measures Act, 23,000 Japanese Canadians were rounded up, removed from the Pacific Coast and detained in internment camps until 1947. Their property was confiscated and sold. Only after a very lengthy community campaign was an apology and compensation granted in the late 1980s.

Full rights as citizens were granted to Asian Canadians in the post-war era.

The 1960 Canadian Bill of Rights offered equality protection for all citizens, and the Charter of Rights of Freedoms formally prohibited racial discrimination in 1982.

Post-1967 immigration policy does not formally discriminate on the basis of race, but is heavily tailored to the needs of the capitalist labour market. However, many third-world migrants lack the requisite skills, education and knowledge of English or French to gain entry under the points system.

There is now a fundamental distinction between citizens who have rights and non-status migrants and temporary workers who don't. Programs allow temporary residence for domestic workers (often trained professionals), initially from the Caribbean, and under the current live-in caregiver program from the Philippines. The seasonal agricultural worker program brings in workers from Mexico and recently other Latin American countries.

In the globalized economy, migration has greatly increased while borders have hardened, leading to a large influx of non-status super-exploited migrants. A new wave of racism targeting Arabs and Muslims has launched under the name of the "War on Terror."

Racialized communities will continue to suffer from wide-ranging social and economic injustices, racist policing and racial profiling. ★

The factual material for this history was primarily drawn from the following, which go into far greater detail: noii-van.resist.ca/?page_id=94; vsw.ca/Documents/RRTimelineJune1thFINAL.pdf. The generalizations, interpretations and formulation are my own. HL

BARACK OBAMA'S VICTORY

What it means for race and class in America

BY MALIK MIAH

There was euphoria in every black community household November 4. High fives and tears of joy. No one could believe it. It didn't matter Barack Obama's politics. A black man had won! The election of the first black president of the United States has a dual meaning: social and political.

Not just African-Americans cheered: The crowd at Chicago's Grant Park was multiethnic – whites, blacks, Latinos and Asians, all together. Obama's victory was overwhelming (two to one in the Electoral College) with more than seven million votes over his Republican challenger.

On January 20, the day Obama was sworn in as president, some two or three million or more people were expected in Washington, D.C. Every black person would like to be present. Fae Robinson from State College, Pennsylvania, who attended the famous 1963 March on Washington where Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his "I Have a Dream" speech, put it on the night of Obama's victory:

"I told everybody, 'I'm going.' I don't have to have a ticket. I just want to be somewhere close. I have to be there. Just to be there is going to be overwhelming."

The social meaning is obvious. When Barack and Michelle Obama and their two girls walked into the White House on January 20, it marked an event that few if any black Americans of the civil rights era thought possible.

GUESTS AT THE WHITE HOUSE

The White House was built by black men and women (most were slaves). They were invisible to the founding fathers, even those who professed opposition to

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VILLAGER PHOTO BY MILO HESS



New Yorkers in Foley Square celebrate Obama's inauguration.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the great liberal, however, never invited an African-American to stay the night.

Presidents Kennedy and Johnson at the height of the civil rights battles never dared invite Martin Luther King Jr., or other civil rights figures, to sleep as guests at the White House. These "friends of civil rights" clearly didn't want to cross their Dixiecrats in the South and bigots in the North.

Amazingly it was President Richard Nixon in 1973 who invited the first African-American guests, Sammy Davis Jr. and his wife, to sleep in the White House. (Davis turned down the Lincoln room out of respect of the "Great Emancipator.")

So it is not surprising that most Americans, including socialists, prior to the victory of the civil rights movement, did not believe it possible that a black man could ever be elected president. It was a

slavery.

Frederick Douglass, the 19th Century black abolitionist, visited President Abraham Lincoln three times at the White House. Yet he was never invited in to sleep as a guest. After Lincoln's second inauguration and an open house to the public, Douglass was turned away at the door because of a standing order that blacks were not allowed to enter for the celebration.

In the 1930s when first lady Eleanor Roosevelt invited black guests to the White House, which she did often, the press sharply criticized her. President

common view before the overthrow of Jim Crow that the end of legal segregation would take a violent confrontation with, if not the overthrow of, the government.

The dirty pact between the slaveholders and manufacturing capitalists at the founding of the United States (to delay an immediate break-up of the new country) created a defective Republic. Slavery was not mentioned in the US Constitution. Black people were not part of “we the people” much less citizens in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution.

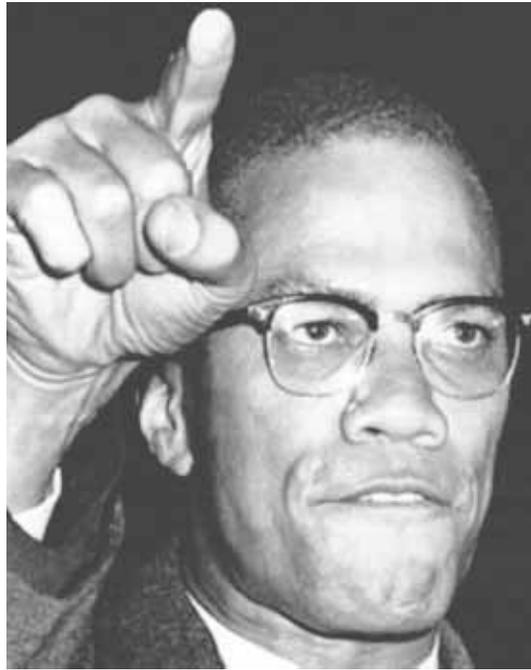
Karl Marx wrote later that the seeds of the civil war were planted at the founding of the United States. Marxists supported the capitalist North in that war with arms in hand to defeat the slaveholders, although some socialists of the day believed that a war between opposing property owners was not “our” war.

Similar debates occurred during the fight for equality after the rise of Jim Crow segregation. Since full equality was not possible under capitalism, should the focus be on “working-class unity” and not taking on racist views of white workers? Socialists understood that the fight for equality even led by liberals was a battle that they had to be in and actively support.

When blacks finally won the vote and could be elected to public office, supporters of independent politics, including socialists, supported many of those campaigns even though we knew their election to office would not end racism. The issue was the democratic right to hold any public office, which both major parties had prevented up to the adoption of the 1964-5 Civil and Voting Rights Acts.

CONTEXT AND SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE

In view of that history, the November 4 election of an African-American father (a bi-racial black man) as president marks the highest electoral point of the post-civil



Malcolm X argued that full black equality is impossible under the monopoly of the twin parties of capitalism.

rights revolution. This is the historical context of Obama’s election victory. For the black community it is not about Democrat versus Republican, lesser evilism or anything else. (Even the first black woman Republican Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, choked up the day after Obama’s win).

For most African-Americans, including myself, Obama’s election is first and foremost an unprecedented victory – a blow against 400 years of black slavery, legal segregation and institutional racism. I watched the returns on November 4 with similar emotions that other blacks expressed in rural towns and major cities. I knew history was being made and cheered Obama’s win being announced as the California polls closed.

Did this mean I think Obama is the answer to racism and black self-determination? No. Blacks are realists about what his victory represents.

I know, as many others know, that Obama’s party represents everything I oppose. I agree with Malcolm X (assassinated in 1965) who said that the road to full black equality is impossible under the monopoly of the twin parties of capitalism. Malcolm, however, understood the power of the mass civil rights movement and preached the need for black unity, self-reliance, alliances and black power.

Obama’s victory, more than symbolic, represents a change in attitudes. But the symbolism

in and of itself is powerful, because of the country’s racist history. It is that symbolism that every African-American understands, including many of those on the right. It is also that symbolism that inspires the oppressed in every imperialist country – from London, Paris, Frankfurt to Sydney and Tokyo.

The question is: what follows?

Blacks will give Obama a long honeymoon. They have high hopes that he will bring real change, but there are few illusions. Blacks continue to suffer twice the unemployment rates as whites. Blacks have the worse housing and schools. More young black men are in prison than in college. There is institutional discrimination on every level of society.

But even if Obama in the White House doesn’t do much for the black community directly, it means something to have a black family running the place.

BEYOND RACE?

What does Obama’s election tell us about race and a “post-racial” America?

Race does matter but it is not what it was even 20 years ago.

I grew up in Detroit in the 1960s in a segregated environment. By the 1980s with years of white flight, Detroit became a basically black city. The suburbs are where most white auto workers live. The term “Reagan Democrats” applied to these workers, who didn’t like the changes brought by the civil rights movement. They felt that blacks had gained privileges they did not have.

Before the election the media focused on these white workers identified as “bigoted” and unable to vote for a black man to be president. The Republicans believed it and ran blatantly racist ads in areas like Macomb County, which is near Detroit. It had worked for over 20 years.

It didn’t work this time. Stanley Greenberg, a Democratic pollster, wrote in the New York Times, “Be-

fore the Democratic convention, nearly 40 percent of Macomb County voters were 'comfortable' with the idea of Mr. Obama as president, far below the number who were comfortable with a nameless Democrat. But on Election Day, nearly 60 percent said they were 'comfortable' with Mr. Obama. About the same number said Mr. Obama 'shares your values' and 'has what it takes to be president.'"

From 1972-1988, the Democratic presidential candidates running in Oakland County (also next door to Detroit), lost the election by 20 points. In 2008 Obama won the county by 57 to 42 percent.

The economy clearly trumped race and racism. But more than that, race baiting failed because many of these workers have children who supported a black man and told their parents so. Even in southern states Obama lost, he did better than most expected. He won North Carolina, Virginia (home of the old Confederacy) and Florida.

REVERSE BRADLEY EFFECT

Not to recognize the evolution of attitudes since the 1960s is to deny reality. While gains in affirmative action have been pushed back and many positive programs that helped blacks and other minorities no longer exist, the number of minorities in elected office is the highest ever. The number of black executives and size of the black middle class is unprecedented.

The "Bradley effect" (whites and others saying they would vote for a black in public then deciding not to) was a negligible factor in the election. In fact I now believe a reverse Bradley effect occurred when many demonstrably voted for Obama to make a point against bigotry.

While some may dismiss these societal changes in racial attitudes as simply a reflection of economic insecurity, in previous hard economic times playing the race card worked.

It is wrong to think Obama's election means the country has gone "beyond race."

The same has occurred when anti-immigrant demagoguery was used to confuse many working people and led them to vote against their own self-interests. Republicans won many elections in the past by convincing white workers that their loss of jobs and opportunities was because of "special rights" supposedly granted to blacks.

The change of attitudes on race are particularly seen among the younger generations — those born after the victory of the civil rights movement. In general they (all races) are less racist than their parents' and grandparents' generations.

Yet it is wrong to think Obama's election means the country has gone "beyond race." We aren't in a post-racial "colour blind" country. Racism and bigotry, and institutional racism, still exist. What Obama's win does is encourage all minorities in whatever fields they pursue to believe more is possible.

There is a psychological change in the population that can't be fully quantified. But it is genuine. Unless there is a legal (and likely violent) reversal of these gains — and I'm not talking only about

programs like affirmative action, but advances in social and political consciousness — the heightened self-confidence over time will expand throughout the black and minority populations. It is widely reported that non-white ethnic minorities as a whole will become a majority of the population by 2050.

Until the victory of the civil rights revolution and the gains won afterwards, it was common to believe in "two Americas" — black and white. While that is still broadly true, it is more accurate to say that the class disparities — the divide between capital and labour — will become more pronounced as the minorities in the middle and upper classes gain more prominence and power.

Race will still play a unique role within both capital and labour. What's new is that the rising minority upper class will be more integrated into the corporate, political and government/state structures. The class dynamics, in this evolving social context, will become sharper within these oppressed communities.

It is not that any black man or woman (or of any ethnic group) can do what Obama did as a standard bearer for a major party. The first time, however, is why the success of the rising black privileged class is seen as a positive model to the black community. But that example can't resolve issues of discrimination in jobs, housing and education equality.

On the one hand, the great excitement of the "first-time" election of a black president — this unique moment — changes all discussions of race. On the other, it means that the democratic socialist vision of how to permanently end racism and confront the broad crisis of capitalism can get a broader hearing.

The debates and discussions about race and class going forward will surely be more complex and profound than any we've seen to date. ★



PACIFIC NORTHWEST LABOR AND CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY PROJECTS

1960s civil rights march in Seattle, Washington.

Hero and Martyr, Rebel and Patriot

MANIPULATING THE MEANING OF LOUIS RIEL

BY ADAM BARKER

Louis Riel Jr., the “founding father” of the province of Manitoba, an iconic figure to the Métis, and a symbol of francophone nationalism, was never in control of his own legacy. Riel defied the conventions of his day by refusing to contribute to burgeoning Canadian nationalism. He would not be part of a state that defined itself by oppressing those deemed undesirable and rewarding those who conformed. Riel embraced his indigenous ethnicity and his peoples’ unique language and heritages. He demanded respect and autonomy to the point of leading two short-lived rebellions against the state.

Yet Riel’s legacy was never his own to make. Instead, his words and actions have been twisted and reinterpreted to justify Canadian imperial aggression and domination, both before and long after Riel’s death. In his day, Louis Riel was considered everything from a criminal to a madman, despite the very different perceptions of him held by the Québécois, the Cree and other indigenous peoples, and especially by the Métis of the Red River Valley. And, as time has passed and Canada has become a bastion of expansive liberalism, Riel’s image has been “rehabilitated” to that of a hero – but a state-sanctioned hero. This flies in the face of his significance to those outside of the Canadian Anglo-white majority.

The story of the two open conflicts between the Métis and indigenous nations of the eastern plains, and the authorities of the young Canadian state, are a well-known staple of the Canadian narrative. They even warrant a Heritage Moment TV clip. Riel, a charismatic figure and exceptional motivator and organizer, came of age in a time when large numbers of people in the north of



Turtle Island lived under the official authority of the Hudson Bay Company’s proto-government of Rupert’s Land, later to be the North West Territories. At the time, Riel’s people, the Métis, were a social and cultural mix of a number of indigenous peoples, including Cree and Anishinabeg, as well as French- and Scottish-descent Europeans. They spoke – and still speak – their own language, and formed self-governing communities of traders, guides, farmers, hunters and craftspeople on the “frontier” – what would later become Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The Métis, as a growing social and political force in the unstable frontier, were almost destined to rub up against the new Canadian government under its first Prime Minister, the hard-drinking, hard-nosed, Anglo-supremacist, John A. Macdonald.

Of course, every child learns about “the Red River Rebellion” in school, usually tied to the story of the creation of the heroic North West Mounted Police – the forerunner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police – and the first paramilitary force deployed to the North West Territories. Few, though, understand the context of the

conflict. The textbooks do not cover the rampant anti-Métis and anti-mixed blood sentiment of the second half of the 1800s. Few know that, long before he became the leader of a rebellion, a Member of Parliament and self-proclaimed prophet, Louis Riel was denied a marriage because the parents of his bride-to-be objected to her marrying a Métis. Just as few know that the man who would become the rebel leader was an intelligent and accomplished student, a former law clerk and an independent-minded man who wrote poetry as he worked his way from Quebec to Chicago to St. Paul and, eventually, home to the Red River.

Perhaps most importantly, few know that it was not Riel and Métis who sparked the conflicts between the Métis and Canada. It was the Canadian state policy of frontier expansion which steered many settlers to the Red River, encouraging white, anglophone, Protestant settlers to flood the Métis camps and villages. These invaders were motivated by eastern authorities, anxious to gain a foothold that would justify the transfer of authority for Rupert’s Land from the Hudson’s Bay Company to the new Canadian state. It was this act of colonization – and an act of war, if the Métis had been considered a nation on par with Western nations – that sparked the famous Red River Rebellion. Riel was thus thrust to centre-stage in Canadian politics and history, culminating in his exile to America and the farce of his repeated elections to a Parliamentary seat that he could scarcely occupy.

Many things can be said of Riel in the final analysis. He suffered from mental illnesses, including depression, following the Red River Rebellion which forced him to flee to New York. He became increasingly influenced by Catholic Church officials, specifically those in Quebec who had vocally supported this French-speaking man against the ambitions of “English” men from Upper Canada. He spent years composing theological texts

See *Riel*: Page 21

Adam Barker is a settler Canadian in Coast Salish territory, working on issues of identity and power in politics and social organizing. He is a guest editor for this issue of New Socialist.

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Making the world's poor pay

BY ADAM HANIEH

THE CURRENT GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS HAS ALL THE earmarks of an epoch-defining event. Mainstream economists – not usually known for their exaggerated language – now openly employ phrases like “systemic meltdown” and “peering into the abyss.” On October 29, 2008, for example, Martin Wolf, one of the top financial commentators of the *Financial Times*, warned that the crisis portends “mass bankruptcy,” “soaring unemployment” and a “catastrophe” that threatens “the legitimacy of the open market economy itself ... the danger remains huge and time is short.”

There is little doubt that this crisis is already having a devastating impact on heavily-indebted American households. But one of the striking characteristics of analysis to date – by both the Left and the mainstream media – is the almost exclusive focus on the wealthy countries of North America, Europe and East Asia. From foreclosures in California to the bankruptcy of Iceland, the impact of financial collapse is rarely examined beyond the advanced capitalist core.

The pattern of capitalist crisis over the last 50 years should alert us to the dangers of this approach. Throughout its history, capitalism has functioned through geographical displacement of crisis – attempting to offload the worst impacts onto those outside the core. This article presents a short survey of what this crisis might mean for the Global South.

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WORLD TRADE DROPS

THIS CRISIS HITS A WORLD ECONOMY THAT, FOR THE FIRST time in history, is truly global. Of course, exports and the control of raw materials have always been important to capitalism. But up until the 1970s, most capitalist

production was organized nationally. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, both production and consumption began to be organized on an international scale. Today, all markets are dominated by a handful of large companies operating internationally through interconnected chains of production, sub-contracting and marketing. Almost every product we consume has involved the labour of thousands of people scattered across the globe – in the production of raw material inputs, research and development, assembly, transport, marketing and financing. At one level, this interconnectedness of production



Workers in call centre in India: capitalist production and consumption is now organized on an international scale with markets dominated by a handful of large companies.

expresses the fact that human beings have become one social organism. At the same time, it continually runs up against a system organized for the pursuit of individual, private profit.

This interconnectedness has taken a very particular form over the last couple of decades. The world market has been structured around the consumption of the American – and, to a lesser extent, European – consumer. Goods produced in low-wage production zones such as China and India, using raw materials mostly sourced from other countries in the South, are exported to the U.S. where they end up in the ever-expanding homes of an overly-indebted consumer. Control of this global chain of production and consump-

tion rests in the hands of large US, European and Japanese conglomerates.

This structure helped to fracture and roll-back national development projects across the globe. Coupled with the debt crisis of the 1980s, export-oriented models of development were imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other financial institutions on most countries in the South. Many of the elites of these countries bought into this development model as they gained ownership stakes in newly privatized companies and access to markets in the North.

The ever-expanding consumption of the US market was predicated on a massive rise in indebtedness. US consumers were encouraged to take on vast levels of debt – through credit cards, mortgages, “zero-down” financing, etc – in order to maintain the consumption levels that underpinned global demand. The dollars that enabled this growth in debt came from financial instruments that were purchased by Asian central banks and others around the world. These institutions lent dollars back to the US where they were channeled to consumers through banks and other mechanisms.

The US real estate market was just one of the financial bubbles that permitted this treadmill of increasing indebtedness to continue. People could continually refinance their mortgages as real estate prices went up. But with the collapse of this bubble, global world demand is suddenly drying up. Because of the interconnectedness of world trade, this will have a very severe impact on every country across the globe, particularly in the South.

One measure of this is shown by a relatively obscure economic indicator, the Baltic Dry Index (BDI). The BDI

measures the cost of long-distance shipping for commodities such as coal, iron ore and steel. From June to November 2008, the BDI fell by 92 percent, with rental rates for large cargo ships dropping from \$234,000 to \$7,340 a day. This massive drop reflects two factors: the reduction in world demand for raw materials and other commodities, and the inability of shippers to have their payments guaranteed by banks because of the credit crisis.

Falling commodity prices also demonstrate this drop-off in world trade. Copper prices, for example, have recently fallen by 23 percent. Chinese consumption of this metal, critical to much industrial production, fell by more than half in 2008. ArcelorMittal, the world’s largest steelmaker, stated on November 5, 2008, that its global output would decline by more than 30 percent. The World Bank – which has consistently underestimated the severity of the current downturn – is now predicting that global trade volumes will shrink for the first time since 1982.

DEVASTATING IMPACT

THIS DROP IN WORLD TRADE WILL HAVE A PARTICULARLY devastating impact on those countries that have adopted “export-oriented” models of development. This model was heavily promoted by the World Bank, the IMF and most economists over the last couple of decades. As global demand shrinks, countries reliant on exports will be faced with collapse of their core industries and potential mass unemployment. This will place further pressure on wages as new labour reserves put pressure on already high levels of unemployment.



Workers in China: In recent years, Chinese exports have been important to the vast US consumer market. With the current economic crisis, exports from China have dropped dramatically, causing unemployment in China to rise.

International bank Standard Chartered estimates, for example, that Chinese exports could tumble to “zero or even negative growth” in 2009. Global financial services company, JP Morgan Chase, is predicting that Chinese exports will fall 5.7 percent for every one percent drop in global economic growth. This is not just a matter of getting by on smaller levels of still positive growth. China needs to create 17 million jobs a year in order to deal with the large numbers of farmers moving from the countryside to urban areas. This means that the country must maintain high rates of growth. Even if growth drops from 11 to 12 percent to eight percent annually, the country faces potentially huge social dislocation. Already, workers in China are protesting in the millions as their factories close and owners abscond with unpaid wages.

MELTDOWN AND COLLAPSE

A COLLAPSE IN WORLD TRADE IS NOT THE ONLY POTENTIALLY devastating threat this crisis presents to the global periphery. Like the 1997 Asian Crisis, the rapid withdrawal of foreign funds from stock markets and other investments in the South could cause the meltdown of currencies and the collapse of industries already reeling from slowdowns in trade. A quick survey of a few countries demonstrates the deadly mix of capital outflows, high inflation and drops in export earnings.

In Pakistan, foreign-currency reserves have dropped more than 74 percent in the past year to about \$4.3 billion US. The country is teetering on the edge of total collapse and urgently requires \$6 billion in order to pay for imports and service its existing debt. The dire situation of foreign outflows led the German foreign minister to state on October 28, 2008, that the “world has just six days to save Pakistan.” At the time of writing, it looks like Pakistan will get this money in the form of loans from the IMF and/or countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Sri Lanka has lost nearly 25 percent of its foreign reserves since the beginning of August 2008, as foreign investors repatriate their dollar holdings from the country. Nearly 50



Bolivian water wars, 2005: Popular struggles thwarted government attempts to privatize water. It will take similar struggles to prevent workers from bearing the brunt of the current economic crisis.

percent of Sri Lanka’s textile and garments exports – some 43 percent of total foreign exchange earnings – went to the US in 2007, while another 45 percent went to the European Union (EU). These exports will likely be decimated by a generalized collapse in demand. The weakening of the Sri Lankan rupee over the last few years has contributed to a 20 percent increase in inflation, with high food prices hitting the poorest most heavily.

India has seen its foreign exchange reserves drop by 17 percent since March 2008. Over \$51 billion US left India during the third week of October, 2008, the largest fall in eight years. The Indian textile industry, which makes up

the second largest component of the country’s labour force after agriculture, exports 70 percent of its product to US and European markets. It is expected that textile and garment orders will decline by at least 25 percent over the winter of 2008-09 and mass layoffs have already begun. On October 29, 2008, the Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industries of India predicted that companies in seven key industries (steel, cement, finance, construction, real estate, aviation, and information technology) would need to cut 25 percent of their workforce. This at a time when the country struggles with an immense gap between rich and poor. The wealth of the richest 53 people in India is equivalent to 31 percent of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP), yet according to the World Bank, 42 percent of the population lives below the official poverty line of \$1.25 US a day.

These patterns are repeated across the globe. Countries including Mexico, Turkey, Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina and South Korea as well as the poorer countries of Eastern and Southern Europe are faced with collapsing growth rates, capital flight and declines in the value of their currencies. In many cases, these problems have been exacerbated by a proliferation of low-interest loans taken by individuals and companies that were denominated in foreign currencies, such as Swiss francs, euros and dollars. These loans initially offered better rates of interest than domestic currencies but, as local currencies have dropped in value, the amount of money to be repaid has increased dramatically. *Business Week* estimates that borrowers in so-called “emerging markets”

owe some \$4.7 trillion US in foreign-denominated debt, up 38 percent over the past two years. This is the reassertion of a debt crisis from the 1980s that never really went away, but only partially subsided.

THE IMF RETURNS

THIS UNFOLDING SOCIAL CRISIS HAS RETURNED THE IMF to centre stage. Typically, the IMF lends to those countries facing potential collapse and, in return, demands the fulfillment of stringent economic conditions. The scale of borrowing is already immense: Iceland (\$2.4 billion), Ukraine (\$16.5 billion), and Hungary (\$15.7 billion) have been extended loans with Pakistan, Serbia, Belarus, and Turkey likely candidates in the near future.

The conditions that come with this latest round of IMF lending have been particularly opaque. The policies that Ukraine is expected to implement, for example, are not yet known, despite the fact that the country has essentially agreed to take a \$16.5 billion loan from the IMF. Hungary has agreed to cuts in welfare spending, a freeze in salaries and canceling bonuses for public sector workers, yet the final details have not been made public. Iceland was required to raise interest rates to 18 percent with the economy predicted to contract by 10 percent and inflation reaching 20 percent.

We can certainly expect that the conditions attached to

loans in the poorer countries in the Global South will be much more stringent than those imposed on these European countries. There is little doubt that these countries will face massive job losses, intense pressure to privatize public resources, and slashing of state spending on welfare, education and health in the name of “balanced budgets.” Whether these attacks on the social fabric are successful, however, will ultimately depend on the level of resistance they face.

AUTHORITARIAN STATE

ON 11 OCTOBER, 2008, A MEETING OF PROGRESSIVE economists in Caracas, Venezuela, issued a statement warning that the dynamic of this crisis “encourages new rounds of capital concentration and, if the people do not firmly oppose this, it is becoming perilously likely that restructuring will occur simply to save privileged sectors.” This is an important point to understand. Capitalist crisis doesn’t automatically lead to the end of capitalism. Without effective resistance and struggle, the crisis will eventually be resolved at the expense of working people – particularly those in the South.

This could be one of the most serious crises that capitalism has faced in living memory. But we should not be fooled into thinking that the system will somehow be reformed or its contradictions solved through peaceful and orderly means. The most likely immediate outcome is a hardened, more authoritarian state that seeks to restore profitability through ratcheting up repression and forcing people to accept the loss of jobs, housing and any kind of social support. In the South, this will inevitably mean more war and military repression.

If this is not prevented, the system will utilize this crisis to restructure and continue business as usual. This is why resistance – both at home and abroad – will be the single most important determinant to how this crisis eventually plays out. In Latin America, for example, attempts to restrict capital flight, place key economic sectors under popular control, and establish alternative currency and trade arrangements are important initiatives that point to the necessity of solutions beyond capitalism. In the Middle East, popular resistance to the political and economic control of the region has undoubtedly checked the extension of US power.

Any displacement of crisis onto the South means playing different groups of people against one another. For this reason, the ideological corollary of war and military repression abroad is likely an increasingly virulent racism in the North – directed at immigrants, people of colour and indigenous populations. This means that, for activists in North America, the question of global solidarity and resistance to racism must be a central priority of any effective fightback. Any attempt to turn inwards or dismiss international solidarity as less important in this phase will be disastrous for all working people – at home and across the globe. ★

Riel

Continued from Page 14

and coming to believe that he was a divinely-ordained leader of the Métis. But all of this must be a footnote to Riel’s role in the petty power-play of the young Canadian state which led, ultimately, to Riel’s return from exile to rejoin the Métis – pushed westward, now, into Saskatchewan – to present their grievances to the government.

Macdonald denied ever seeing the missive presented by Riel, and this marginalization influenced the Métis and their indigenous allies to rise against Canada a second time, even knowing that the odds of success were more remote than during the Red River conflict. While the failure of the North West Rebellion and the subsequent hanging of Riel are also a well-known narrative, it is important to remember why this happened: because Riel, and by extension the Métis, simply had no place in Canada’s ambitious plans. This assault on an entire people, genocide by contemporary standards, stands in stark contrast to the image of Riel presented by the government now: a “father of Confederation” and national hero.

Riel, denied a voice because of his heritage, language, religion and homeland, would likely object to this treatment. Of course, as much as times have changed, one thing has not: mainstream Canada retains the power to define “others.” Riel, a symbol of so many different things to so many different peoples, remains a commodity to be traded in the politics of a quietly racist state. ★

UN WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM

Many flaws in support for Palestinians

On April 20-24, 2009, United Nations representatives will meet in Geneva for the **Durban Review Process**. This is being put forward as an opportunity to review proposals adopted at the World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. The aim of the review process will be to set a date for the next world conference against racism and to explore how the program of action from Durban is being implemented.

In the following article, **SARON GHABRASSELLASIE** and **NATASHA VALLY** examine and critique the program of action adopted at the 2001 Durban conference as it applies to Palestine and the Palestinian people. They also look at the controversies surrounding the upcoming review process.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF UN-BACKED PROCESSES AND THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) adopted in 2001 by The World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), composed of 122 paragraphs and a preamble, was a framework for the UN and states to target racism, xenophobia and associated intolerance. In this document, the questions of the Israeli state and the Palestinian people are featured prominently.

Palestinians are explicitly mentioned in the section on victims in the DDPA – although no reference is made to the aggressor or the source of systematic racial discrimination. Also mentioned are people of African and Asian descent, migrants, refugees, women and children. While it asserts that all states should facilitate the safe and voluntary return of refugees, it does not explicitly position racism and discrimination as critical factors in the Palestinian plight. Instead, it goes on to reiterate the failed and violated UN resolutions relating to Palestinian people and the Israel-Palestine “peace process.” Here it is clear that the rhetoric of the peace process and a two-state solution is maintained. Both of these have been criticized by civil society organiza-

tions. The peace process is clearly flawed since none of the critical issues such as refugees, Jerusalem or the settlements are adequately addressed. Similarly, the currently proposed two-state solution will certainly lead to a “Palestinian state” that would be no more than a series of bantustans. There is also the acknowledgement of “the right to security of all states in the region, including Israel,” an acknowledgment that once again reinforces the victimhood of an aggressive, colonial, occupying power.

The DDPA has not been effective in holding Israel responsible and curbing its

aggression and does not provide practical steps towards overcoming this racial discrimination. Neither was there a UN mechanism put in place to assess and target racism against the Palestinian people.

Since the adoption of the DDPA, Israel has continued to prevent refugees from returning – by force and law – and has persisted with a program of aggression including the bombing and attack on Lebanon in 2006 and, most recently, the siege and starvation of Gaza with a swansong in December 2008 of the brutal bombing of Gazan civilians.

Starkly different to the DDPA's failure to acknowledge Israel as the perpetrator of racism and racial discrimination toward Palestinians, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – expressed at the 2001 NGO Forum in Durban – have consistently framed Israel as a racist, colonialist and apartheid state. This claim is substantiated by the experience of Palestinian people, as well as by historical research



Israel's illegal apartheid wall annexes the best land and resources for Israeli settlers and isolates Palestinian villages and communities from each other and from their lands, livelihoods and access to education and health care.

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and UN human rights mechanisms, among others. Civil society organizations have asserted that 1948 was the starting point for Israeli legislators and governments who, in conjunction with Zionist organizations and their subsidiaries, have established and developed a regime of institutionalized racial discrimination that caters to the interest and advantage of the dominant group and maintains the inferior status of the indigenous Palestinian people and oppresses them systematically.

Practically, civil society groups internationally have engaged in educational campaigns to alert the public and their states to Israel's apartheid history and to assert the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Following the suggestions of the 2001 NGO Forum in Durban and Israel's consistent disregard for international law – including the blatant dismissal of the 2004 International Court of Justice advisory ruling that the wall being constructed is illegal – civil society groups have called for and instituted a Campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel until such time as it complies with international law. Worldwide, members of churches, academic unions and solidarity committees – initiated in Europe and North America – have implemented and pushed for divestment from companies implicated in Israel's illegal and criminal regime, boycotts of affiliated institutions, goods and services, and calls for sanctions. In 2005, over 170 Palestinian unions, associations, NGOs and their networks, reflecting the three major sectors of the Palestinian people – those under military occupation, Palestinian citizens of Israel and refugees in exile – launched a strategic call for a comprehensive BDS campaign currently being spearheaded by the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) in coordination with the International Coordination Network on Palestine (ICNP).

WHY HAVE THERE BEEN CONCERNS AROUND AND BOYCOTTS OF THE DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE AND THE DDPA?

Clearly there were governments and individuals uncomfortable with the space provided to scrutinize issues related to

racism and discrimination at the WCAR. This resulted in the WCAR being labeled an orchestrated “hate fest.” The Indian government, for instance, tried to keep the discrimination of the Dalits off the agenda. There were attempts by some governments to prevent discussion of the intersections of racism with gender, sexual orientation and caste. The Bush Administration was dissatisfied with discussion of issues around reparations for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Together with Israeli delegates, the US also objected to the tabling of issues relating to the discrimination and plight of the Palestinians. In the end, the US and Israeli delegations walked out of the conference.

In fact, the central allegation levelled against the WCAR was that it expressed

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anti-semitic sentiments. Anti-semitism is defined as racism and racial discrimination against Jewish persons on grounds of their membership of that religious or ethnic group. The WCAR was certainly not racially attacking Jewish people. In fact, quite to the contrary, it supported the plights of vulnerable people worldwide. Debates and discussions embraced the plight of the Dalits in India, the Roma in Europe, indigenous people and immigrant workers around the world, reparations for slavery, and foreign occupation and numerous other pressing issues. In focusing so overwhelmingly on the Palestinian question, critics of the WCAR have misrepresented the Durban conference's broad, inclusive hu-

man rights agenda as a narrow agenda of a specific region – implying that the WCAR process itself was overtaken by “special interests.”

What's more, the accusation of anti-semitism is often used to discredit and silence criticism of the state of Israel. The irony is particularly apparent when Palestinians and their supporters described racially-motivated human rights violations perpetrated against them with specific reference to international human rights and humanitarian law standards and norms, including in relation to acts of ethnic cleansing, discriminatory legislation, systematic perpetration of war crimes and the crime of apartheid.

At a meeting in 2006 the UN general assembly decided to convene a Durban Review Conference in 2009 on the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. That draft was adopted by a recorded vote of 179 in favour to two against (Israel, United States), with four abstentions (Australia, Canada, Marshall Islands, Palau).

Preparations for the Durban Review Conference have been accompanied by an hysterical campaign of manipulation, threats and economic/funding intimidation. The Bush administration opposed the review conference, and the Canadian government, succumbing to this pressure, impulsively withdrew. This decision was made without consulting organizations representing people in Canada most affected by racism, some of whom were present in Durban and have worked for the past six years with the Canadian government on critical anti-racism initiatives stemming from the WCAR.

With Obama at the helm, the US at first dithered on its refusal to participate but has now announced that it will not attend. As we go to press in early March, the US, Canada and Israel are the only three countries upholding the boycott, with reactionary forces in Denmark and Holland applying pressure on those countries to join. As for Canada, its refusal to participate is sadly consistent with an abysmal track record on standing up for human rights, and Palestinian rights in particular. ★

BUSINESS AS USUAL?

Reflections on the BC Treaty Process

By Adam Barker, Christine O'Bonsawin and Chiinuks Ogilvie

THIS PAST YEAR, 16 YEARS SINCE THE creation of the British Columbia Treaty Process (BCTP), heralded celebrations of three new treaty settlements. A close examination, though, reveals colonial business as usual.

The Tsawwassen and Maa-nulth First Nations were the first groups to reach agreements with the government, ratified by a community vote. These agreements were met with lavish praise from the government and media, but encountered much more controversy in indigenous communities. The Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation followed suit, accepting a deal that will give them money and control of some forest lands in exchange for staying at the negotiating table and accepting some government provisions.

The ratification of the Tsawwassen and Maa-nulth "treaties" – not treaties at all, but financial and governance agreements – and the "incremental treaty agreement" with the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation are ominous signs of a continuing colonial agenda, pushing onward to a sanitized and homogenized Canadian society free of meaningful difference.

LAND: A COMMODITY?

The critiques of the BCTP have been numerous and varied. However, commentators rarely draw the connection between the BCTP and racial and racializing processes. In reality, the two go hand in hand. It is not possible for the state to tighten its grip on indigenous lands unless it weakens the ties between the indigenous peoples and the lands on which they live. It is not possible to pry indig-

enous peoples from their lands without convincing both indigenous peoples and settler Canadians that indigenous peoples' cultural and historical relationships to the land are outdated and have no place in a capitalist state.

Most people have never seen the BCTP work from the inside. Each meeting begins with a prayer, sometimes even in a traditional language. But the language of the meeting quickly shifts. From talk of relationships to the land and ancestors and respect for each other, there is a transition to the language of "underly-

From talk of relationships to the land and ancestors and respect for each other, there is a transition to the language of "underlying title" and the value per unit of specific sites.

ing title" and the value per unit of specific sites. The land is reduced to a commodity.

The Tsawwassen and Maa-nulth agreements include provisions requiring the respective band governments to build centres for tourism and economic development with the monies received from the negotiations (whatever's left over after the legal bills). Further, each of these agreements solidifies the supremacy of the state over all lands, giving the state the right to annex any piece of land. Fee

simple title may be transferred to a given First Nation government, but underlying title reverts to the Crown. The recently-developed Tla-o-qui-aht incremental treaty agreement is similar to both the Tsawwassen and Maa-nulth agreements, requiring the development of tourist centres. The treaty clearly states that forest lands transferred to the band are administered – not owned – by the Tla-o-qui-aht.

The government approaches "negotiations" with a number of non-negotiables beforehand: the ability to hand-pick participants (insistence on exclusive negotiations with "First Nation governments," otherwise known as Band Councils); underlying title to land reverts to the Crown; and capitalist economic development is necessary. Ultimately the power structure of the Canadian state is reinforced by the new BC treaties.

THE PRICE OF TREATIES

Indigenous peoples' entrance into the state system comes with a fee. The negotiations themselves involve travel, legal bills, research, and votes, all of which cost large amounts of money which usually is acquired in the form of government loans. According to a 2002 Report of the Tripartite Group entitled *Improving the Treaty Process*, \$255 million has been negotiated in support of BCTP – \$204 million in the form of loans and only \$51 million in the form of contributions. Those loans come due as soon as an agreement is put into force, immediately clawing back many of the financial benefits that a band might otherwise receive through the deal. Band governments, already dependent upon funding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, will find themselves not only deeper in the pockets of the government, but also in the pockets of the consultants, contractors, and service and tourism corpora-

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tions standing ready to build the new post-treaty economic infrastructure.

Why would any person affected by one of these agreements vote in favour of ratification? This is a fair question. It is important to understand how much of the negotiating happens behind closed doors. The manner in which the agreements are made is rarely presented to voting members. Final agreements between negotiators are publicly presented as a *fait accompli* in a simplified, decontextualized format while opponents, if there are any, are still trying to sift through the information.

This is why the ratification failure of the Lheidli T'enneh agreement in early 2007 was so stunning. Of course, this setback merely intensified the pressure to complete the Tsawwassen and Maa-nulth agreements, and subsequent stepping-up of bribes like the incremental treaty agreement, which provides benefits before treaty settlement.

It is important to understand the history of colonization to appreciate the difficulty facing these communities. The Maa-nulth and Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations, as members of the Nuu-chah-nulth peoples, have only been in contact with Western colonizers for about 275 years. For many Nuu-chah-nulth, the culture and sense of “who we are” remains. But facilitated by the influence of residential schools, Western ideas of progress and being a “good citizen” have started to take hold. Many Nuu-chah-nulth people end up being pulled between traditional ways of being and introduced ideas.

COOPTING TRADITIONS

Some leaders, traditional and political, know the culture and the traditional ways, but speak of it in one breath, only to adopt Canadian political language and processes with the next. The state has



First Nations activist Art Manuel leads a group launching a legal challenge to the BCTP.

engineered and supported this. In recent negotiations with the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations, the Treaty Commission made the blatantly token gesture of having the *hatwiah* (traditional chiefs) sign into the treaty process, but without empowering them to have a voice at the table. They were never provided with the correct knowledge and language to engage with the Western side, and attempts to bring traditional culture and values into the discussion were ignored.

When the traditional chiefs and other leaders, long the unspoken heads of the major opposition to the BCTP, begin to discuss land in terms of real estate values, contracts with mining companies, and labour market development strategies, it is clear that the BCTP has gained serious traction. The cooptation of traditional leaders also

The Treaty Commission made the blatantly token gesture of having the hatwiah (traditional chiefs) sign into the treaty process, but without empowering them to have a voice at the table.

closes off one of the few spaces that women and youth have had to express themselves. The importance that many indigenous cultures place on womanhood and the teaching of young people has helped women and youth to have their voices heard. However, to date, no BCTP agreement has included a committed initiative to involve women or youth. Some of us have attended meetings and raised the question of violence against women and youth; during the treaty process the response is always “we’ll deal with that when the deal is signed.” Nothing in the history of the BCTP lends credence to that promise.

Few outside observers appreciate the difficult position that all dissenters face with regards to the BCTP: the choice is to oppose both the vast Canadian system and your own community, with the threat of poverty and violence hanging in the air, or to stay silent and pretend, as many others do, that you do not see the chains being wrapped ever tighter around your community and nation. This is not a choice that anyone would wish to face. This much is true: without a safe space to express dissent, and discuss the implications of the BCTP and other poisonous “partnerships” in a way that will have meaningful impacts, dissenters can be simply left behind by the entire process, voices in the wilderness.

EMERGING DISSENT

A critique of BCTP has slowly begun to develop among indigenous students and scholars at universities and colleges. These are safe spaces for dissent. But the debate now must be taken back into the communities, if it is to be meaningful.

Beyond the universities, there are a number of indigenous groups that are emerging in response to BCTP. Well-known organizer and activist Art Manuel is leading a group of people who are launching a legal

challenge to the BCTP. Elsewhere, the Common Table – a Saskatchewan initiative providing a forum for First Nations and government representatives – advocates better deals with government. These activities indicate that the willingness still exists to try and exhaust all means of confronting the system by using the tools of the system.

More inspiring, though, are people emerging within communities, operating with little or no capacity, but who are generating discussion by speaking out. They are “nameless people”: mothers in families, aunts, and even young men who argue that treaties will “finish off assimilation.” From an organizational perspective there is little evidence of resistance, but those living in the communities can see that there are people who are collectively gathering their strength. People are meeting together over coffee and talking

The debate now must be taken back into the communities, if it is to be meaningful.

about the BCTP, in some cases for the first time.

In many cases, these people are residential school survivors, or are the children of survivors. For them, going through the treaty documents is difficult given their lack of education in Western legal and political complexities. But they are pulling together in a family way and trying to cut through the jargon. They need support in being able to articulate their concerns.

That support may come from those organizing against the Olympics. In the

lead-up to Vancouver 2010, there has been considerable organizational opposition on the part of indigenous groups and others to resist the Olympic Games, with the slogan “No Olympics on Stolen Indigenous Lands.” The unfortunate reality is that the Olympic engine will not be stopped and the Games will take place on unceded indigenous territories. But this organizing is not a waste if the critical thinking and capacity to resist that is developed in the anti-Olympics movement can be turned to the still-unresolved questions surrounding the BCTP. As the world, albeit briefly, turns its attention to Vancouver, British Columbia, and Canada, indigenous peoples, activists and supporters must take this opportunity to inform and educate national and international audiences on the political and everyday lived realities of indigenous British Columbia. ★

First Nation ‘partnerships’ and the Olympics

The new BC Treaties are framed in the context of preparations for the Olympics. It is no surprise that the Tsawwassen agreement was the first completed under the BCTP. This secured the uninterrupted functioning of the major passenger and shipping ports for the lower mainland. A disruption to either of these ports, with the eyes of the world on Canada, up to and during 2010, would have been a massive embarrassment.

The new treaties require First Nations to develop tourist centres that flaunt indigenous cultures to national and international visitors. As we approach 2010, there can be little doubt that this initiative is directly linked to the agenda of the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC). VANOC has successfully unveiled indigenous “inspired” symbols including the inukshuk logo and mascots drawn from indigenous lore. Despite expressions of outrage from indigenous people, VANOC has refused to even consider withdrawing these appropriations of their culture.

Canadian governments and elites have long prioritized grandiose



Poster from Week of Resistance Against the 2010 Olympics held in Vancouver in December of 2007.

international events as theatres for garnering recognition for Canada as a leading Western imperial power. At such events, the “Indian spectacle” serves as confirmation that a Canadian identity is not contingent on European ancestry and traditions. The insertion of the “timeless Indian” into the global spectacle also demonstrates that Canada has successfully colonized and contained its own indigenous populations.

At the same time, VANOC has partnered with First Nations to sanitize the image of the Olympics under the rhetoric of “sustainability.” According to Agenda 21, the International Olympic Committee’s global action plan, bid planners and organizers are required to partner with “major groups.” Accordingly, upon entering into the bid process, Vancouver planners officially entered into protocol agreements

with the Four Host First Nations (FHFN). Indigenous communities throughout British Columbia have openly contested and questioned this partnership as it is considered to be a “sell-out” arrangement that ignores the realities of indigenous poverty and oppression in BC. ★

White privilege in queer organizing

BY PROMA TAGORE

Queers for Peace and Justice (QPJ) is a broad-based movement that grew out of worldwide protests against US imperialism leading up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. With large contingents in New York City and San Francisco, QPJ consisted of a coalition of queer, anti-war, anti-racist, labour and socialist activists that called out to lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, transgender, transsexual and intersex organizations to stand in opposition to the war on terror. Initial callouts highlighted the state and media's manipulation of people's emotions and grief after 9/11, and the silencing of dissent perpetuated by colonial wars.

In Victoria, on the unceded territories of the Lekwungen peoples, a group took up this call by organizing protests both as a response to the impacts of racism and increased racial profiling in our lives and to confront the pervasiveness of white privilege that many of us, as queer people of colour, had faced in experiences with mainstream queer organizing.

As we gathered to make banners, we felt the words of activist J.D. recorded at a San Francisco anti-war rally: "Every day we're told that we don't exist. Well, that's a lie like everything else. We have to combat that lie with our presence." We took our signs – No Pride in Occupation! – and marched "unofficially" in the local pride parade (white organizers had denied us an official spot the previous year) to reclaim the historical foundations of pride, with people of colour, poor and working class people, and transgender and transsexual activists leading struggles against police and state regulation. These

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histories are often erased or coopted by the white middle class.

RACISM AND HOMOPHOBIA

White privilege within organizing takes many forms. A recent case is the reporting of a gay-bashing on Davie Street in Vancouver in 2008. Within media reports, white queer organizers cited the "infiltration of Davie Street by South Asian youth from Surrey" as the reason for the gay-bashing and increased violence. An article in the local queer newspaper listed the handful of arrests that took place on the basis of homophobic hate in 2008, and almost all of the names listed were racialized names. These accounts not only make invisible the pervasiveness of homophobic and transphobic violence, but also erase the facts of police brutality and continuous systematic targeting of racialized communities, while replaying stereotypical ideas of who belongs where.

Delving into the history of anti-immigration legislation, filmmakers Ali Kazimi, John Greyson and Richard Fung report that in 1915, the year following the Komagata Maru incident – where a ship carrying 300 South Asian men was refused entry into Canada and made to

wait without necessities for months as white citizens marched in the thousands to "keep Canada white" – 60 percent of sodomy trials in BC were against Sikh men. This statistic shows how racialized bodies, especially resistant ones, are cast as sexually deviant and policed by means of detentions and incarcerations. Heteronormativity is also reinforced through the domestication of bodies to uphold a racist and capitalist state.

INTERSECTIONS OF STRUGGLE

So why must challenging white privilege be important to queer movements, just as challenging heteronormativity must be to anti-racist organizing? As Audre Lorde writes, "there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." Queer critic Jasbir Puar speaks of how queer activists of colour, in the context of 9/11, allied more with mainstream anti-racist organizations in the face of white privilege in queer politics. This division of our communities and allegiances is a typically colonial strategy. It not only breaks up our movements and the force of our resistances, but breaks those bodies that are marginalized on multiple fronts, making them disappear. ★

Racism and the battle for democratic unions in the US

BY MALIK MIAH

THE DEEPENING RECESSION IN THE United States is impacting the fight for democratic, independent unions and trade unionism in general. Unions in the US represent fewer and fewer workers – 12.1 percent overall, with the rate in private sector even lower. The number one issue in the eyes of most working people today is keeping their jobs. All other issues seem secondary.

Racist workplace discrimination is still there. Racial profiling continues, especially if you are a black male. Yet there have been changes. Racism on the job, especially in union jobs, is not the number one concern of African-American workers. When layoffs occur, blacks in union jobs know that the seniority system is their best protection. Favouritism in non-union jobs where management is still mostly white is another matter, but federal and state laws do provide more job security than ever before.

At the same time, union seniority doesn't help when an entire industry is shutting down. Black workers work disproportionately in industries in decline, including auto and steel. This is important because African-Americans are more dependent than whites on higher-paying manufacturing jobs to get "middle class" incomes.

The decline in jobs in manufacturing, which was traditionally heavily unionized and where many workers had decent wages and benefits, has been replicated in other industries, especially in those where a requirement of high school education or two-year college or trade school degrees are more prevalent. The significance of these jobs losses is great: the so-called "middle class" – actually the unionized working class – of the black community

Malik Miah is an editor of Against the Current.



WAPPOINTS

United Airlines mechanic: a court-imposed consent decree opened up jobs for black and other workers of colour.

is withering away. More highly educated middle-class layers have been driven back too.

UNIONS

It's clear why unions are especially important for African-Americans. But the union movement is in crisis. Unions like the United Auto Workers and United Steel Workers have received blows from earlier waves of restructuring and are now being hit hard by the deepening world recession.

All US unions are in retreat and have been since the early 1980s when President Reagan fired striking air traffic controllers and broke their union. *Organized labour must push back and demand fundamental changes that benefit all working people* – not just try to hang on. Without the rise of a new militant union movement or a movement of unemployed workers as occurred in the 1930s, labour will continue to shrink and weaken.

In previous struggles, black workers

played a major role when progressive unions opposed discrimination and supported civil rights. That was the case in the airlines.

THE CASE OF UNITED AIRLINES

For example, at United Airlines, where I work, in the 1970s several African-Americans filed a lawsuit against racism in the workplace. The charge was against both the company and unions that refused to end institutional racism.

The court ruled in favor of these workers and imposed a consent decree. The court mandated full integration of the workplace in skilled jobs from which blacks had been excluded or in which they faced discrimination. It led to the first black pilots and more black mechanics and supervisors.

The court imposed fixed hiring goals on the company for supervisory positions and on the unions for higher skilled positions. The union contract had to be changed to modify the seniority system

– something union officials strongly opposed. The officials argued that only contract negotiations could alter the collective bargaining agreement, not the courts.

While in general I would agree with this stance, in this case, racism required an outside body to force management and union officials to fundamentally change social relations on the job. The civil rights laws likewise forced state and federal governments to end legal segregation and forced employers to change hiring and promotion practices.

Historically unions have used the defence of contracts and seniority rights as a way to accept the status quo of race discrimination. The consent decree modification at United Airlines was an important positive change. It led the other airlines to open the doors to better jobs for workers of colour without a court order. It forced the airline unions to begin to change their attitudes and leadership composition.

In the case of the workers represented by the International Association of Machinists union, including baggage handlers, storekeepers and, most importantly, mechanics, it meant that company-wide seniority would protect workers in higher skilled jobs from layoffs once they bid and qualified for those positions. No longer would high seniority blacks in lower classifications refrain from taking jobs as mechanics for fear of being laid off in the future.

This was a significant change because,

in the 1950s and 1960s, many qualified black mechanics were not hired as mechanics. They had to take lower classification jobs, such as ramp and storekeeper positions. The civil rights victory led to cracks in the companies' hiring policies that increased the number of black mechanics who, if they had been given jobs like their white co-workers, would have already had many years of mechanics' seniority. The consent decree gave back that full seniority for layoff purposes.

Significantly, this contract modification occurred outside of normal negotiations. It has not only helped blacks, but also at least as many other workers. Every worker gained from that anti-discrimination lawsuit. As generally is the case, when an oppressed group wins a gain, it benefits all of society.

Of course, there is still racism prevalent at United Airlines and other unionized carriers. But the racism is not what it was. The blatant discrimination of the pre-consent decree era is rare. Moreover, the companies, because of the laws, are more forceful in responding to acts of discrimination.

UNION DEMOCRACY

In cases like this, building democratic unions is more about issues that cut across racial lines. The building of rank and file unity today will be on basic economic issues and union democracy.

In my situation at United's major maintenance base in San Francisco, we

Unions are especially important for African-Americans.

have had anger among workers at the existing unions. In the last five years, we've had three unions – two were decertified – and racism was not a factor. The big issue was job security after a phony employee ownership scheme established in 1994 and bankruptcy in 2002. Both the activist opposition and the new union leaders are racially mixed.

The central issues are rank and file control, how to fight the boss, and union transparency. Should negotiations be open to the rank and file? The leaders of the Teamsters, the current union of mechanics, reject this. They advocate and practice complete secrecy from the members. The previous union, the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association, not only advocated democracy and openness but practised them. Sadly, it didn't matter in the end, because of job losses and fear of the impending economic crisis.

KEY POINT

My basic point is that the issue of racism in difficult economic times is, at best, only one factor in the minds of rank and file workers seeking change in leaderships. No one tolerates prejudice and discriminatory actions by the company or within the union. The old battle to integrate the employers and unions and end segregation was won. It remains a fact on the ground nearly everywhere in the US including the South. The new fight to build democratic unions will require a similar if not greater effort.

Blacks are equally a part of existing union leaderships as well as opposition groups that advocate progressive independent unions. This is a positive development for both racial and class reasons. It means the debate over ideas such as democratic unions, how to bring about fundamental change for working people, and the devastating cost of wars and occupations is more clearly on the table. ★

A recent study reports that 55 percent of union jobs lost in 2004 were those of black workers with black women comprising 70 percent of union jobs lost by women.



UNAW



ROBERT ALLISON

No One Is Illegal Rally in Toronto, May 2008

Organizing for migrant justice and self-determination

A conversation with MOSTAFAH HENAWAY, NANDITA SHARMA, JAGGI SINGH, HARSHA WALIA, and RAFAEF ZIADAH. Reprinted from the 30-year anniversary issue (2007) of *Fuse Magazine*, www.fusemagazine.org

Over the past several years, groups and movements have coalesced around themes like “No One is Illegal,” “Solidarity Across Borders,” and “Open the Borders.” In their day-to-day work of organizing with and for migrants, such groups are working against increasingly restrictive immigration policies, the heightened detention and deportation of migrants and the repressive national security apparatus that discriminates against racialized migrants through mechanisms like Security Certificates.

At the same time, such movements are deeply connected to global movements, resisting further expansion of the capitalist system and wars and occupations – in places such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine – that are the root causes of people’s migration and displacement in the 21st century.

Finally, the integrated focus on the relationship that exists between the colonization of diverse indigenous people and the subjugation of migrants portrayed as “not belonging” in Canada, has enabled such movements to make the connections between the dispossession of people from their lands and livelihoods from the global South and the encroachment onto indigenous lands throughout the Americas. Always alert to the danger of trivializing the serious differences that have come to form between groups, there is, at the same time, a recognition that without attempts to work against the idea, for example, that the social justice demands of indigenous people and migrants are inherently at odds with one another, we will contribute to the propping up of a global system that ensures our mutual destruction.

MOVEMENT FOR MIGRANT JUSTICE

HARSHA: I think the migrant justice movement as it has evolved over the past few years has really been able to push a radical analysis on migration and has challenged the traditional dichotomy of 'legitimate' versus 'illegitimate' migrants. The very name "No One Is Illegal" is very powerful and rejects any reformist approaches to 'improving' Canadian immigration policies. Such movements have been able to articulate an analysis that challenges the power of the state to construct categories that control peoples' right to self-determination and links local and global issues of migration, race, nationalism, capitalism and imperialism.

However, we still continue the struggle to build a more comprehensive movement on the ground because we are fighting a system that has been successful in dividing, isolating, and individualizing the struggle for immigrants, refugees and non-status communities. This often gets internalized as the "model minority" syndrome, where migrants themselves internalize ideas of who is "worthy" and who is "unworthy."

MOSTAFAH: One of the major ongoing debates in the migrant justice movement is the issue of casework, which is the constant need for tangible support work – including legal defence – for individuals and families going through the immigration or refugee process. There is a clear understanding that the professional immigrant and refugee service industry and infrastructure has contributed to channeling migrant's experiences into victimization and dependency. So instead, we try to do support work in a way that is part of a larger political context of organizing and helps build larger cultures of resistance.

Direct casework is necessary in order to support those who are affected by the repressive policies of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and to build a movement that is rooted in people's lives, but it is an ongoing struggle

The very name "No One Is Illegal" is very powerful and rejects any reformist approaches to "improving" Canadian immigration policies.

to ensure that it does not become simply about service provision and that those directly affected are constantly involved in empowering themselves through the process.

NANDITA: I think the relationships being established and work being done by No Borders movements are full of great potential but they also continue to be highly tenuous. There is much excitement as we recognize our deep relationships with one another across the borders of "race" and "nation," for instance as migrants groups act in solidarity with indigenous struggles.

At the same time there is much hesitation to let go of exclusive and divisive identities since these are so tied up with what it means to access power. For example, ideas of being "at home" are still very much racialized or nationalized. That is, many people continue to think that everyone has some "natural homeland" and that this, and only this, is where they "belong." This is tied up with the current world order where only 'nations' are seen as having any right to 'self-determination' but such notions are, ultimately, hostile to people's migration. Unfortunately, such an anti-migrants politics is not only part of the Right but also, in many cases, part of the thinking of the most radical parts of the Left.

THE IDEOLOGIES OF DISPLACEMENT AND SETTLEMENT

RAFEEF: I believe the same definition of settlers applies to both Turtle Island and Palestine. In Palestine/Israel, anyone who espouses the ideology of Zionism and identifies with the project of Zionism is a settler. There is a tiny minority of Israelis who are anti-Zionist and I do not see them as settlers as they are with us in the fight. There are also migrant workers, for example North African Jews and Arab Jews, brought into Israel to work in specific industries. Unfortunately, they too have internalized the Zionist ideology and despite their second-class status in

Mostafah Henaway is a second generation Egyptian who has been involved with Toronto Taxi Drivers Association, Solidarity Across Borders Montreal, Block the Empire Montreal, Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, and the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid.

Nandita Sharma is an activist scholar who is part of a loose network of No Borders groups that challenge the legitimacy of national border controls with their regimes of citizenship and also work to ensure that everyone has the ability to both "stay" and to "move" as they so desire.

Jaggi Singh is a writer, activist, and anarchist living and organizing in Montreal. He is a No Borders, anti-capitalist, immigrant and indigenous solidarity organizer involved in a wide range of movements.

Harsha Walia is a South Asian organizer and writer currently based in Vancouver, Coast Salish Territories. She is involved in migrant justice organizing, feminist and anti-racist collectives, South Asian community organizing, indigenous solidarity, and anti-imperialist networks.

Rafeef Ziadah is a third generation Palestinian refugee who lost her parents in the 1982 Massacre at the Shatilla Refugee Camp. She is a member of the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid and Sumoud (a Palestinian political prisoner solidarity group), and a political science student in Toronto.

Israel, they believe themselves to be one level above the Palestinians. Settlement is not only physical occupation; it is also an ideology. Therefore you could have people who are physically on the land who are not settlers, while also having settlers who are not physically on the land, for example Zionists in New York who fund the physical settlement and occupation of Palestine.

In terms of Turtle Island, the same logic applies. Immigrants or others who come from backgrounds of oppression and occupation do not absolve themselves of being settlers. Immigrants are settlers, especially as immigrants rise with class mobility. However, immigrants who decide to fight for indigenous self-determination free themselves of being settlers. It is horrible for Palestinians to imagine ourselves as being settlers; therefore it is even more important for us to commit ourselves to fighting for the liberation of Turtle Island.

NANDITA: To me, not all those who live on occupied lands can or should be considered colonizers (which is really what is meant when people are called “settlers”). To suggest that anyone who migrates is a colonizer is a perverse logic that has embedded within it a deep hostility to the whole process of human migration. The process of colonization (in which the term “settler” colonist was developed) refers to a specific kind of relationship in which some people attempt to destroy previously existing societies in order gain privileged access to land, resources and labour. We must recognize that not all migrants do this and that most migrants today, including many indigenous people, are caught up in a vicious circle of displacement and migration. If we see the entire process of capitalist globalization as a form of colonization, it is hard to imag-

To suggest that anyone who migrates is a colonizer is a perverse logic that has embedded within it a deep hostility to the whole process of human migration.

ine a single place in the world today that is not occupied territory.

To say that people should not move to places that are occupied would in fact be an argument that people shouldn't move. For example in Hawaii there is one part of the anti-occupation Hawaiian sovereignty movement that calls for a Hawaiian governing body (that is a national state in all but name) that would issue passports and implement border controls. Such practices are very dangerous as they are not at all transformative and only change *who* rules rather than eliminating the colonial practice of a group of elites ruling over others. To me, that kind of movement is not going to get us anywhere.

RAFEEF: I do not believe anyone claims ownership over land. Capitalism is a political and economic system that has created the framework private property ownership and ideas about entitlement to land. I believe in the philosophy of ‘indigenism’ in which no one owns the land; instead, everybody shares it. And certainly such a philosophy is not about ownership or entitlement; rather it is a radically anti-capitalist idea about living with respect with one another and with the land. An ultimate goal for me is to have the liberation of a Palestine that is not exclusionary and where your rights are not based on religion and ethnicity. This is in contrast to the Zionist Eurocentric project where Zionism claims a fascist and exclusionary identity.

JAGGI: I believe active struggle against colonialism – and for indigenous sovereignty and self-determination – is the main point here. Settlement is as much an ideology as a practice, and the only way to escape complicity with settlement is active opposition to it. I do organize on the basis of a vision for no borders and free movement. But, I have never heard of an indigenous theory of decolonization that is about expulsion – expulsion of a corporate mine perhaps – but never of people who migrate to achieve dignity in their lives. The Mohawk Two Row Wampum, which represents the idea of natives and non-natives traveling side-by-side in mutual respect, provides us with one example of a basis for understanding a relationship of respectful and just coexistence between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

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Six Nations protesters at Caledonia in 2006 create a blockade to defend land rights claims: over 500 years after colonization, indigenous peoples on Turtle Island are still fighting for justice.

“Decolonization” – understood as the active practice of self-determination against colonialism and neo-colonialism by non-natives – is something we need to actively be thinking about and taking responsibility for. That only happens in the context of on-the-ground, day-to-day organizing, and creating and cultivating the spaces where we can begin dialogues and discussions as natives and non-natives, within a shared terrain of struggle.

NANDITA: We must deal with the fundamental issue of colonialism and recognize that after 1492, the relationship between people and place is crucial; is there a connection that is timeless that allows no room for migration? The concept of who is indigenous to a land needs to be rethought. Indigenous people are displaced and become migrants too. For example, 25 percent of migrants from Mexico are indigenous. So to me those dichotomies of indigenous/migrant and displacement/homeland are false. People need to see themselves as part of the whole world that they live in and we need to forge new identities that are transformative in breaking down the structures that oppress us, while also challenging ourselves about who we see ourselves in the struggle with.

All people have an inherent relationship to land; the question becomes which land. The divisions are not between indigenous and migrants; rather the divisions are between different ideas of what to do with land. There are indigenous cap-

italists who want to follow the project of economic development and private indigenous ownership, and there are those who believe in the values of common use. The vision I support is this non-industrial model of common use and self-sufficiency. So we need to shift the debate from *who* has the entitlement to do something with the land to *what* do you want to do with the land.

HARSHA: The crucial idea around the identification of oneself as a “settler” is a way to acknowledge and take deep responsibility as a person on an occupied land and to understand how we all, regardless of our oppressed backgrounds, do benefit in various ways from this process of colonization. This awareness leads itself to the necessity of engaging in a struggle of decolonization, acting in tangible solidarity with indigenous peoples, and building greater awareness within and across communities. However, I also think we need to delink the idea of migration from settler-colonialism, which is a capitalist and colonial ideology. We have been conditioned to believe that all those who migrate are settler-colonialists because the migration of the “discoverers” is celebrated by a colonial education system. Although the distances and frequency with which people migrate has rapidly expanded; people have always moved, traded, and connected with each other without being colonizers.

We need to expand on a radical praxis that acknowledges the inherent claims to land and territory that diverse communities hold, while maintaining an ethics of anti-segregation as cultures are constantly refounding themselves.

Therefore, we need to expand on a radical praxis that acknowledges the inherent claims to land and territory that diverse communities hold, while maintaining an ethics of anti-segregation as cultures are constantly refounding themselves. This does not suggest a simple call for “unity” across our differences – in particular those that are rooted in systems of power and privilege – but to struggle from our specific locations while building genuine alliances with each other. This requires us to exercise our sovereignties differently, to think of our identities as a place of connection rather than exclusion, and to radically reconfigure our kinship and solidarities based on shared experiences and visions.

In terms of the relationships between immigrant and indigenous communities, I think we have a shared experience of racism and colonization. However, I would be cautious in over-simplifying the relationship. Certainly comments such as “our struggles are the same/equal” are patronizing and deny the current violent reality – the genocide of indigenous people – that is distinct from the colonial agendas we have fled in the South or are facing as migrants in the North.

JAGGI: I also want to note that the presumed link between diverse communities is not natural. The term “people of colour” is too generalized (as most folks who use it admit). It lumps migrants from diverse backgrounds, with descendants of slaves, with indigenous peoples, in a really crude way. Again, it’s through on-the-ground organizing that meaningful alliances are created, as well as meaningful “identities” that flow from struggles, rather than being abstracted onto them.

RIGHT TO REMAIN AND THE RIGHT TO MIGRATE

MOSTAFAH: Migration is an extension of foreign policy. Most people in the world today migrate because their right and their ability to remain in their homes is being violated by Western imperialist governments. The further South that the Northern governments outposts extend into, the further North the Southern migrants enter. The borders between the so-called First World and the so-called Third World have shifted rapidly, and the First



Palestinians comprise one of the largest refugee populations in the world. These girls are among more than four million Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Others live in neighbouring Arab countries like Jordan and Lebanon as well as scattered throughout the world in diaspora.

World is equally becoming a space for fighting national liberation struggles in the South as the South itself is. An extension of the right to remain in your home in Algeria, Palestine, or Iran is your right to remain in your home in Montreal and fight your deportation.

NANDITA: National liberation does not produce liberation and if we continue to romanticize that, we are setting up future generations. People are not coming to grips with how things changed with 1492. One of those things is human migration and the ways in which the encounters of people have intensified. Yet many of us are behaving as if we are living in a world where continents are separate or that it is desirable for them to be separate. For me, unless we are able to acknowledge the impossibility and undesirability of that, we cannot move forward.

For example, do we want to live in a world where someone like me can only claim rights to use the land in a place where I was born (India) but where I do not live or have significant ties to? Such arguments basically get boiled down to a right-wing politics of “everybody go home,” where home becomes a static idea, which is contrary to human reality.

HARSHA: I do not think the struggle for the right to remain and the struggle for the right to migrate are con-

trictionary; I think they are the paramount struggles we face globally today. The reality is that we struggle for a world in which no one is forced to migrate against their will, and also for a world in which people are able to move freely. The reality of migration today is that millions are forced to migrate due to colonial, capitalist, and oppressive forces. However even without these forces, people should have the right to migrate and I think we need to challenge the assertion that people are only able to migrate if they are 'forced' to do so. In the ideal anti-capitalist world that I wish to live in, the borders between fighting in the homeland/fighting in exile disappear as the idea of ownership and entitlements to different spaces is eradicated.

RAFEEF: In the context of Palestine and Palestinian refugees, I see no conflict between demanding the right of return for Palestinian refugees to their homes before the 1948 Al-Nakba, while at the same time demanding that the Canadian state not deport Palestinian refugees. There were, for example, some Arab community leaders in Canada who were trying to suggest that Palestinian refugees should "stay" in Palestine and fight for Al-Awda (right of return) and that the struggle against deportation of Palestinian refugees in Canada was undermining the struggle in Palestine. I believe, however, that the underlying motivation amongst the people making those arguments was a desire to maintain their privilege and an unwillingness to confront the Canadian state's ongoing practices of deportation.

JAGGI: Yes, in that example, the seeming contradiction is just for those who are removed from the situation. There is no contradiction whatsoever between both asserting the right of people to move, and at the same time asserting the right for people to not be forcibly displaced from their homelands. It's a false debate, imposed by people with a superficial understanding of what it means to be a migrant. Free movement, and the right not to be displaced, are two essential elements to the assertion of collective and individual self-determination. That's exactly the premise from which the day-to-day organizing work of groups like No One Is Illegal comes from, and why activists in such groups see no contradiction between engaging in indigenous solidarity work while fighting deportations and repressive border regimes.

THE WAY FORWARD

RAFEEF: I want us to imagine a struggle that is more united and less sectarian. All over the world people are calling for our solidarity and I wish more people understood the absolute necessity of political engagement and struggle. We need more people to commit to the work of daily organizing and to build a base of meaningful organizing. I think we also need to critically think about the difference between political work and simple sloganeering and constantly question the effectiveness of what we are doing and whether it is grounded in the lived realities of people.

MOSTAFAH: I feel that sometimes our analysis is comprehensive and all-encompassing, but in reality and in practice, we need to build stronger connections between diverse issues and movements. People need to come to terms with the reality that the borders of national liberation and of the global South really do extend out to North

America. An effective movement must profoundly shift how we negotiate the borders that separate us and prevent us from making meaningful connections in the fight for a more just society.

NANDITA: Our greatest challenge is to build a strong, grassroots movement demanding free mobility within the context of a world where people are not continuously displaced by the

daily practices of global capitalist wars, plunder, and destruction of our environment. This is tied to the way we think about our relationships with one another and our self-identities. Our most effective models to disrupt these systems are those that are attentive to changing both the way we think and identify and to changing the dominant structures of our world.

HARSHA: I think we face various challenges – to build more sustainable movements, more effective movements, more nurturing movements, more transformative movements, more comprehensive movements, more anti-oppressive movements, more community-rooted movements, more creative movements, more relevant movements, more emancipatory movements, more disruptive movements. But I do believe that the only way to come closer to achieving any of these is to actually engage in the struggle for liberation and freedom and to actively participate in the collective organizing to build the movements that we desire and demand. ★

In reality and in practice, we need to build stronger connections between diverse issues and movements. People need to come to terms with the reality that the borders of national liberation and of the global South really do extend out to North America.

Jewishness, Israel and Palestine solidarity

BY ALAN SEARS

Jewish women occupied the Israeli consulate in Toronto this past January in protest against the brutal Israeli assault on Gaza. German Jews published an open letter condemning Israeli policies, and in New York there was a large demonstration of Jewish voices in protest.

The Israeli attack on Gaza has pushed a small counter-current in Jewish communities to greater activism and visibility in support of peace and justice for Palestinians.

This counter-current is the result of tireless organizing over a long period of time by Jewish critics of Israeli policy and anti-Zionists. This counter-current challenges the dominant establishment of Jewish communities, which equates the fate of the Jewish people with the State of Israel.

The simple equation of Israel and Jewishness is one of the powerful ideological bases used not only to defend every action of the Israeli State, but also to silence criticism and erase Palestinian existence. It is important for those of us who are Jewish to challenge this equation, and the myths associated with it.

MYTHS OF THE ISRAELI STATE

The first myth is that the State of Israel is the single outcome of the history of the Jewish people, the final end of generations of diasporic existence. It turns the Zionist project of a Jewish nation into the monopolistic politic of Jewish establishment organizations.

The Zionist ideal of a Jewish national state is relatively recent, dating from late in the 19th century. Jewish

Alan Sears is a member of the Toronto New Socialists.

nationalism, the idea that the best way to overcome anti-Semitism and ensure the future of Jewish people, was to form a separate national state, emerged as a minority stream in debate with Jewish universalism.

Jewish universalism, which has now been largely marginalized, argued that the future of a minority, diasporic community depended on winning widespread freedoms that applied to all members of society. That meant that in Canada, for example, the Jewish population was historically very active in struggles for a wide range of social rights and against the idea of Canada as a Christian nation.

The domination of Zionism since the founding of the State of Israel has largely silenced Jewish universalism. The defence of the State of Israel is now portrayed as the single legitimate expression of Jewishness, even by organizations like B'nai Brith that historically acted as universalistic human rights organizations. Criticism of the State of Israel is seen as an attack on the Jewish people and categorized as anti-Semitism.

Of course, the official Jewish organizations always concede that there is in principle such a thing as legitimate criticism of the State of Israel, but actual criticism of Israel is virtually always attacked as explicitly or implicitly anti-Semitic. Indeed, criticism of Israel is the basis for the so-called "new anti-Semitism" that many Jewish establishment organizations have constructed as a threat.

The idea that criticism of the State of Israel is explicitly or implicitly anti-Semitic rests on the notion that Israel is selected for undue criticism because it is a Jewish state. Defend-



Boston protest against Israel's war on Gaza, January 2009.

DENNIS FOX

ers of Israeli policy routinely attempt to direct our attention to abuses happening in other places and insist that a hidden agenda must underlie any focus on Israeli brutality in this unjust world.

This argument would lead to paralysis in human rights activism by trying to claim that one must address all cases at once, or only the "worst" cases. This would lead us to tell Rosa Parks, who refused to go the back of a segregated bus in Alabama in 1955, to quit whining as conditions were even worse in South Africa, or colonized Kenya, or for that matter for Palestinians in refugee camps.

THE DIFFERENT STANDARD

If anyone is holding Israel to a different standard than other nations, it is in fact its supporters. Every Israeli act of aggression is qualified as defensive; every violation of international law is portrayed as legitimate. This requires a massive re-writing of history, one that makes the Palestinians and their own aspirations disappear. The crudest version of this casts Israeli settlers in the role of "making the desert bloom," erasing the record of Palestinian habitation and Zionist ethnic cleansing so well documented by Ilan Pappé and others.

Opponents of Israeli policy or the Zionist project do not criticize Israel (overtly or covertly) on the basis of the ethnicity or religious convictions of its population, but rather because of a brutal history of terror, expropriation, demolition and oppression aimed at dislocating and marginalizing the Palestinian population to allow Jewish settlers to stake their claim to a state on someone else's land.

The equation of Israel with Jewishness sometimes leads to problematic myths in solidarity movements as well. People in the Palestine solidarity movement will sometimes explain the silencing of Palestine within the Canadian context in terms of Jewish power within Canadian society. This is a problematic formation, which disguises Israel's role in a broader project of imperialism and capitalist intensification in the region.

The silencing of Palestine and support for the State of Israel in the press and across the spectrum of "official" politics in Canada is not the result of Jewish power. Rather, it draws on the so-called "war on terror" that identifies the peoples of West Asia, South Asia and North Africa as a special threat to "western civilization." This idea did not appear out of nowhere on September 11, 2001, but rather draws on a long history of imperialism and racialization.

This takes a particular form in North America, where there are marked parallels between Zionist project and our own histories of colonization. Does our own settler solidarity lead North Americans to accept Israel's accounts of ethnic cleansing to create a "land without a people" for settlers? The erasure of Palestinians is easier to accept given its resonance with the experience of First Nations peoples on this continent.

RACIAL IDENTITIES

This process also draws on the deracialization of Jewish people in the North American context. Before World War 2, Jews (along with others from Southern or Eastern Europe) were seen as a racial group with particular given characteristics. Only after the horrors of the holo-

caust, and long battles for full citizenship, did Jews become "white."

The virulent anti-Semitism that blocked the immigration of Jews fleeing the Nazis, and which daily confronted Jewish residents of Canada with violence and discrimination, has declined as Jews of European ancestry gained access to white privilege. This does not mean that anti-Semitism has disappeared, but it certainly has lost some of its power for Jewish people who are accepted as white.

Indeed, there are powerful parallels between the condition of Jewish people in the Canadian state before World War 2 and people of South Asian, West Asian and North African descent today. Not only are there sweeping similarities in the processes of racialization and specific stereotypes, but also specific parallels in the attribution of a subversive project to

destroy "our" way of life ("Jewish Communism" and "Muslim Terrorism").

Given the equation of Israel with Jewishness, those of us who are Jewish have a specific responsibility to speak out in solidarity with Palestinians. If we do not, the establishment Jewish organizations will continue to offer unconditional support to Israel in our name. The growing visibility of a small counter-current of Jewish people protesting the assault on Gaza is certainly a hopeful sign.

At the same time, we must recognize that our access to white privilege gives our voices undue access to means of expression while those of Palestinians remain silenced. We have a responsibility to speak out and an obligation to work in concert with Palestinians, supporting the expression of those whose voices are most excluded from the debate. ★



“Why did the Equity Office at Carleton ban this poster? Could this poster be construed in any way as anti-Semitism or hate speech? A serious freedom of speech battle is under way on our campuses about the right to discuss, portray and organize around the realities of Palestinian life.”

RESOURCE EXTRACTION IN THE MARITIMES

Historic links with racism

By SHERRY PICTOU AND ARTHUR BULL

In the context of colonialism, both past and present, deeply rooted racism and industrial extraction of natural resources seem to go hand in hand. Both are aspects of the fragmentation that lies at the heart of the colonial enterprise. On the one hand, the social fragmentation caused by racism is required in order to prevent effective resistance. On the other, the ecological fragmentation is needed for natural resources to be mapped, privatized, commodified and exploited. This is especially true in Nova Scotia, where cultural divisions and conflict, hardened into longstanding patterns in the 18th century, have always been overlaid with patterns of untrammled exploitation of natural wealth, especially in the fishery and forestry sectors.

Most recently, this twinning of racial conflict and resource exploitation has been set out in stark outline once again. This became very apparent after the Supreme Court's Marshall Decision on fisheries in 1999, which recognized the treaty rights of Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and Passamaquoddy people to participate in the commercial fishery. What followed was a period of conflict between First Nations and local non-native commercial fishermen.

But this conflict did not happen in a vacuum. It happened against a background of privatizations and industrial overexploitation in the Atlantic commercial fisheries, which was part of accelerated corporate onslaught against the region's natural resources. In this context, racism is not simply an individual problem, but an institutional and historical one. Systematic racism has colonial threads interwoven through time up to the globalization of the present and continues to play a critical role in the ecological crises of the present.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

For many of us, the key to resisting these twin threats is to realize common

cause between the struggles of First Nations and non-native coastal communities. After all, both communities are being hurt by these forces. In many cases our communities have been kept apart by deliberate effective "divide and conquer" tactics of the federal government. In response to this, the activist in us wants to say: "Ok, get on with it – let's form the coalition and start acting in solidarity." It seems simple enough.

In fact we have found from our solidarity work in southwest Nova Scotia that it's a little more complex than that. Our experience has been that this work of coalition-building is as much cultural as political. Discovery of common ground and taking common actions has called for the creation of alternative cultural forms. Different ways of meeting, different kinds of "safe spaces" where we can share stories, as well as cultural production such as video and photography, creative writing – all these have made it possible to link the struggles of people who have been divided in their

histories. Along the path there have been many moments of insight and inspiration that have pointed us in this direction – more than can be related here – and some of these have become teaching stories in their own right.

One such story that has been told many times took place at the height of the tension following the Marshall Decision. At a critical meeting between chiefs and lobster fishermen's representatives in southwest Nova Scotia, at a point where violence seemed imminent, the whole direction of the meeting was radically changed by the suggestion of one of the chiefs – former Chief Frank Meuse of the Bear River First Nation – that the meeting be held as a talking circle with an eagle feather. Furthermore the participants were to speak, not for themselves, but for their grandfathers or grandmoth-



Clam digger Terry Wilkins.

Sherry Pictou is a writer, educator, activist and former Chief of the Bear River First Nation and Co-Chair of the World Forum of Fisher People.

Arthur Bull is a writer, musician and community organizer who lives on Digby Neck in NS.



ers. The effect was transformative, both for the situation (serious violence was averted), but also for all the individuals in the meeting. This resulted in real cross-cultural learning, on the one hand about the fishing industry, and on the other about the Mi'kmaq community. And this learning has provided the basis for long term interaction and solidarity.

In the ten years since then there have been many examples of meeting in different alternative ways, creating spaces in which to meet in different ways.

Solidarity on defending the Bay of Fundy against a US megaquarry: This was an intensive schooling for all of us about how industrial development happens in rural Canada. It also enabled members of Bear River First Nation to learn about their own traditional attachment to the Bay of Fundy, in some cases from non-Native elders of Digby Neck.

Opposition to privatization of clam beaches: This struggle revealed to all of us that privatization will exclude all members of all communities, regardless of treaty rights, labour rights or fundamental human rights. It also showed that a community organization, in this case the Marine Resource Centre, can force a public process that allows for voices from all communities to be heard.

In connection with these struggles we've sought to build relationships through a series of "dialogue dinners" bringing together communities of Mi'kmaq, African-Canadian, Acadian

and British Isles heritage to share music and food and dance. Indigenous and non-indigenous fisher people have also been engaged in learning circles to develop analysis and strategy, using a variety of means. We have met together at the local level; we've been involved in "telelearning" sessions bringing together coastal and arctic peoples who have a common interest in defending traditional subsistence economies; we've organized study tours to learn about community-based fisheries management in BC and New England; and we've made links with wider struggles, both national and international, through organizations such as the World Forum of Fisher Peoples. Alternative social spaces like these can support transformative learning that leads to joint action.

CULTURES OF RESISTANCE

We have found that cultural production, especially the use of community-based video, has played a key role. In 2004 the Bear River First Nation temporarily entered the fisheries on its own terms, with support of local small-scale fishers, rather than through an industrial, state-monopolized, privatized model. Some key moments were witnessed on videotape. This process was also documented in a film by Martha Stiegman that was influential in our communities in its own right. Since then the Marine Resource Centre and Bear River First Nation have sponsored a number of workshops using video and photography as a means of witness, expression and alternative knowl-

edge production. Groups like the local clam diggers association now videotape all meetings with government officials as way of keeping them on public record.

These examples are offered not as prescription, but simply as lessons that we have learned here in Nova Scotia. Many more examples could be cited. The main point is that this kind of solidarity work requires alternative approaches and spaces, and that cultural production plays a key role in the process. Without this, we are at risk of following the same old pre-ordained patterns that again and again have left us isolated as victims, replicating fragmentation that underlies very colonialism we are struggling against.

Finally, our experience in southwestern Nova Scotia had another dimension that is critical to understanding the nature of this work: it presented opportunities for much reciprocal learning from the perspective of both the facilitator/activists and the people directly victimized by privatization in their ongoing struggles to protect their livelihoods.

We entered into a space of reciprocal, intentional learning because the situation demanded a more complex response than "Let's just get on with it." This reciprocal learning happened when the experience of victimization turned on its head, and the alternative ways of knowing inherent in cultural and livelihood practice were shared and developed. Some of this kind of learning had been already happening in an unintentional way.

Our unintentional learning was based on our never-ending experience of reaction to what we now realize was misinformation and deliberate divide and conquer tactics. These tactics have most often been presented as part of government policies of "economic growth." In fact, these represent an agenda for privatization of our places, the living things that inhabit them and the communities that depend on them. It is an agenda that excludes the possibility of both indigenous and non-indigenous small-scale harvesting cultures and economies. In the end, it is only those who are living this nightmare who can transform it. ★

Yes Virginia, there is racism ... and a lot of other bad stuff in toys and media

BY SUSAN FERGUSON

There is a famous experiment conducted during the segregationist 1940s in the US. New York psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark placed a black baby doll and a white baby doll side by side on a table. They then asked 253 black children which doll they wanted to play with and why. Two-thirds of the children chose the white doll. In 1985, and again in 2005, similar experiments produced the same results. (A short film of the latest version called *A Girl Like Me* can be viewed online at wwwmediathatmatters-fest.org/6/#.) The children's reasons for choosing the white doll were also consistent. It was "more beautiful," and "nicer," while the black doll was "bad" and "dirty."

The 1947 experiment proved, said the Clarks, the extent to which segregation harmed black children's self image – a conclusion cited in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* trial that ended official segregation. The consistent pattern in the results, however, points to something socialists have long argued: it takes more than a change in the law to overcome the deeply rooted racism of modern society. It also, however, points to an issue socialists haven't spent much time thinking through: how children's interactions with toys speak to fantasies of a better life, fantasies that are bound to be inflected with the racism, sexism and class elitism that penetrates capitalist society.

That the multi-billion-dollar toys, games and media industries both exploit and fuel those very fantasies in their product designs and marketing is the source of a longstanding social unease. The moral panic about children's culture discussed in the popular media tends to focus on

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In experiments done in the 1940s and repeated in more recent years, the majority of both black and white children chose a white doll over a black one.

its appeal to sexual and violent fantasies. Bratz doll clothing and facial expressions are decried as too "sexy" for the six-year-olds who play with them. Pokémon figures and spin-offs celebrate aggression and competition over compromise. Video and online games, like *Grand Theft Auto* and *EverQuest*, turn children into virtual Columbine-like killers.

CULTURAL STEREOTYPES

Intriguingly, race and racialization are rarely at the forefront of such panics. Perhaps that has to do with the more numerous and arguably more positive – if still overwhelmingly stereotyped – representations of racialized communities on television. Since the 1990s, racialized communities have increasingly taken centre stage in shows like *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* or *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. And often now, an irony-laden script draws on cultural stereotypes in order to poke fun at them – however blandly.

But the extent to which these shows are evidence of real progress in TV-land is questionable. First, it's important to note that they do not exist because of a sudden interest in promoting the communities they represent. They are first and foremost a response to the fact that advertisers are now willing to buy time for shows that are targeted to those communities they judge to have sufficient purchasing power. But more significantly, however ironic, they generally fail to seriously challenge dominant ideas about race – or gender – or about the naturalness of such social divisions in the first place. Indeed, the alternately self-deprecating and ironic humour only confirms the perception that "other" cultures are essentially different from the dominant Euro-white culture.

Most such shows, especially those aimed at young children, are also vehicles for conveying highly moralistic messages about individualism, generosity and self-

improvement. For example, two popular “educational” TV shows geared to the very young, *Go Diego Go* and *Dora the Explorer* – both of which feature smart and adventuresome Latinos – relentlessly push the message that any child can overcome the odds if they just try – or think – hard enough. Indeed this is *THE* formula – a formula that, however well-meaning, has little to offer to the daughter of a migrant worker who doesn’t even have the legal right to attend school, or the kid who goes to school on an empty stomach.

When it comes to toy characters, the action figure market appears to have bypassed issues of race and racism because of the immense popularity of the monstrous and mechanical. But while Transformers, to take one example, aren’t human enough to be assigned particular races, racialization is naturalized in the very fact that the market line is based on two competing races, the Autobots (good guys) and the Decepticons (bad guys). Now there may be, as psychiatrist Bruno Bettelheim argues, good reason to gear children’s stories and toys into more simplistic categories as suggested by battles between good and evil – as play helps children cope with their relative physical and social powerlessness by enacting conflicts between opposing forces. But too often the bad guys are also “otherized,” invaders from foreign lands or planets, while the good guys are “Americanized” in voice, and through the (Western) human connections they make on earth.

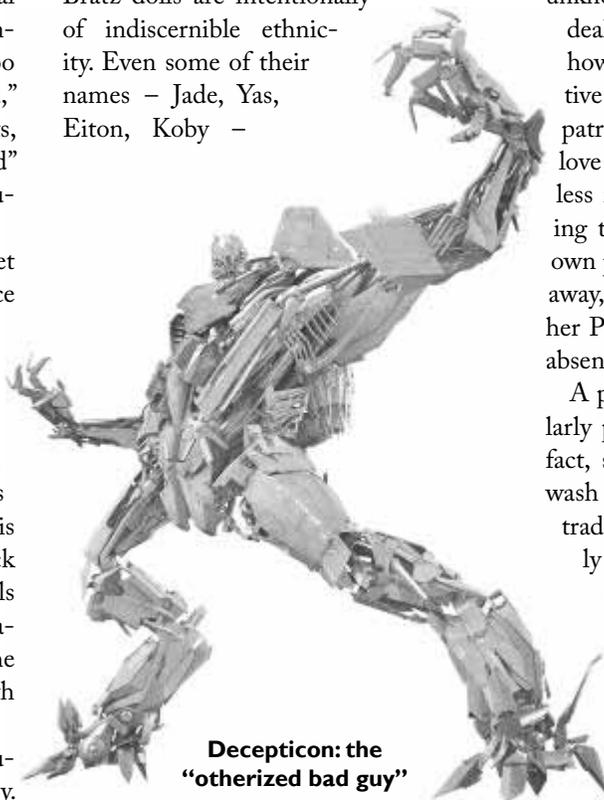
As far as the girl-targeted doll market goes, the realism of the dolls makes race more directly present. Among baby dolls, where the French firm Corolle dominates the North American market, whiteness (and femaleness) reign supreme. An unscientific estimate, based on visits to Toronto toy stores, is that less than one percent of shelf space is given over to black (or boy) dolls. A click through the Toys R Us website reveals that maybe up to five percent of its catalogue listings are “ethnic” baby dolls. The chances of finding a baby doll that is both black and male? Next to zero.

Inscribing fashion dolls with particular ethnic identities has a longer history.

A click through the Toys R Us website reveals that maybe up to five percent of its catalogue listings are “ethnic” baby dolls.

Mattel introduced the “Coloured Francie” Barbie in 1967 but the designers failed to adequately “ethnicize” her. Initially criticized for her Caucasian hair and facial features, a more “Afro-Americanized” Christie came out the following year. Today, Mattel produces an international line of Barbies, including an Arab, Filipino and “Oriental” Barbie, among many others. Distinguished mostly by their fashion and accessories – which emphasize stereotyped cultural traits – they are all endowed with the same tiny waist and long flowing locks of the 1959 original. (Mattel actually thickened Barbie’s waist from a real-life equivalent of 18 inches to 21 inches in 1997.)

Meanwhile, MGM Entertainment’s Bratz line of fashion dolls pursues a different racialization strategy, one that may be responsible for the considerable headway they’ve made into the Barbie market. Bratz dolls are intentionally of indiscernible ethnicity. Even some of their names – Jade, Yas, Eiton, Koby –



Decepticon: the “otherized bad guy”

seem made up. This has the marketing advantage of both drawing on the coolness of urban multiculturalism without alienating potential buyers who may find some dolls “too ethnic.” Mattel, in fact, responded in 2005 by launching a Barbie line – called My Scene – that follows a similar formula. If it’s risky to market a doll from somewhere, why not market it from nowhere?

ERASURE FROM HISTORY

The erasure of race and oppression though is most evident when the toy and media industries tackle history. Films like Disney’s *Pocahontas* is a prime example. The historical tale is sketchy, but we know this much: white colonists kidnapped Matoaka, a young, married, Powhatan woman around 1613 in Virginia. After a year of living with her captors, she married tobacco businessman and settler John Rolfe, who took her to England where she was produced before elite society as evidence that North American natives could be “civilized,” and the burgeoning colony was safe for further settlement. She died shortly thereafter, in her early 20s, and is now buried in an unknown grave in England. Rather than dealing with these uncomfortable facts, however, Disney tells the story of a native teen who rebels against her father’s patriarchal ways as she falls deeply in love with a white man, but nonetheless remains loyal to her people, refusing to go with the man she loves. Her own premature death thousands of miles away, and the subsequent decimation of her Powhatan Confederacy is, of course, absent from the Disney story.

A popular line of historical dolls similarly plays fast and loose with historical fact, sanitizing and romanticizing it to wash it clean of anything that might contradict the notion that things are exactly as they should be. American Girl dolls are designed and marketed as healthy alternatives to Barbie and Bratz dolls – with little girl figures and conservative clothing. They come in a multicultural array of designs, each packaged with stories describing historically-based

adventures. As feminist children's literature scholar Elizabeth Marshall describes, the Mexican-American War figures briefly in the story of the Latina doll, Josephina. After explaining that when the war ended in 1848, America "claimed most of the land that is now the southwestern United States," the story goes on to state that while she never would have imagined it, Josephina "would one day be an American – and the cultures and traditions of the New Mexican settlers and their Pueblo neighbors would become part of America too." Isn't that grand? The destruction of the Pueblo communities and lives that this entailed are conveniently not part of this history. As Marshall quips, "Let's just say I don't anticipate a Black Panther American Girl doll to turn up any time soon."

And, as with Barbie and Bratz, the American Girl doll line is all about accessorizing. There are endless fashion accessories and accoutrements, such as horse saddles, necklaces and grass skirts – the latter for the Hawaiian American Girl of course – that children can (must!) buy to get the most out of their dolls. Just as the ethnically-sensitive TV shows for young kids draw on and reinforce the middle class ideology of individualism and self-improvement, the ethnicized doll industry pumps up capitalist consumerist values and practices. Australian soci-

Children bring their own interpretation to and their own mode of interacting with these products – one that can and often does resist the intended messages.

ologist Beryl Langer has a lovely term to describe this trend, the commodity – a toy whose commodity features outweigh their play features. The commodity, never complete in itself, *stimulates* rather than *satisfies* longing by showcasing the additions and updates that are necessary for the (never quite) complete play experience. In the 1950s, Mattel management referred to this as the "razor blade



Bratz dolls: designed to encourage the purchase of ever more accessories and accoutrements and encouraging capitalist consumerist values.

strategy" – Barbie, like the razor handle, remains constant, while her accessories, like the throwaway blades, are constantly renewed and updated.

The commodity strategy brings us back to the issue of children's play fantasies and social oppression highlighted so well by the Clark's 1947 experiment. For, in stoking a longing for the novel, Mattel and other toy companies both play into and strengthen all the racialized, gendered and class elitist norms that have seeped from children's lived experiences into their play fantasies. And because they flood the market, such toys leave little room for alternatives.

With all this in mind, I want to end by stressing an important caveat when it comes to assessing the impact of such an industry on children's hearts and minds. There is no doubt that the toy and media markets promote appallingly regressive ideas about race, gender and consumerism. But their promotion, and a child's absorption of those messages, are two different things. In fact, plenty of research suggests children bring their own interpretation to and their own mode of interacting with these products – one that can and often does resist the in-

tended messages. What's more, there is something distinct about play itself – it's open-endedness and inherent freedom – that, at the very least, runs against the grain of the instrumentalist messages and intended meanings of marketed toys.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Still, as play is one of the crucial ways through which children come to know the world and their selves (become subjects of history to use a Marxist phrase), the stuff of play – what form it takes, who produces it, and how kids play with it – merits our critical attention. And while it's hard to know the impact of the children's culture industry on actual children, we can, and should, push for children's right to access media that is divergent and progressive in its messages. What if children had at their disposal a variety of toys and media that spark and resonate with alternative fantasies, ones that disrupt dominant, socially sanctioned ideas and feelings? The more toys and media are sanctioned, distributed and patrolled by the forces of capitalism, the more such alternatives will be edged out by toys, games and media that reproduce racist, sexist and class elitist norms. ★

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