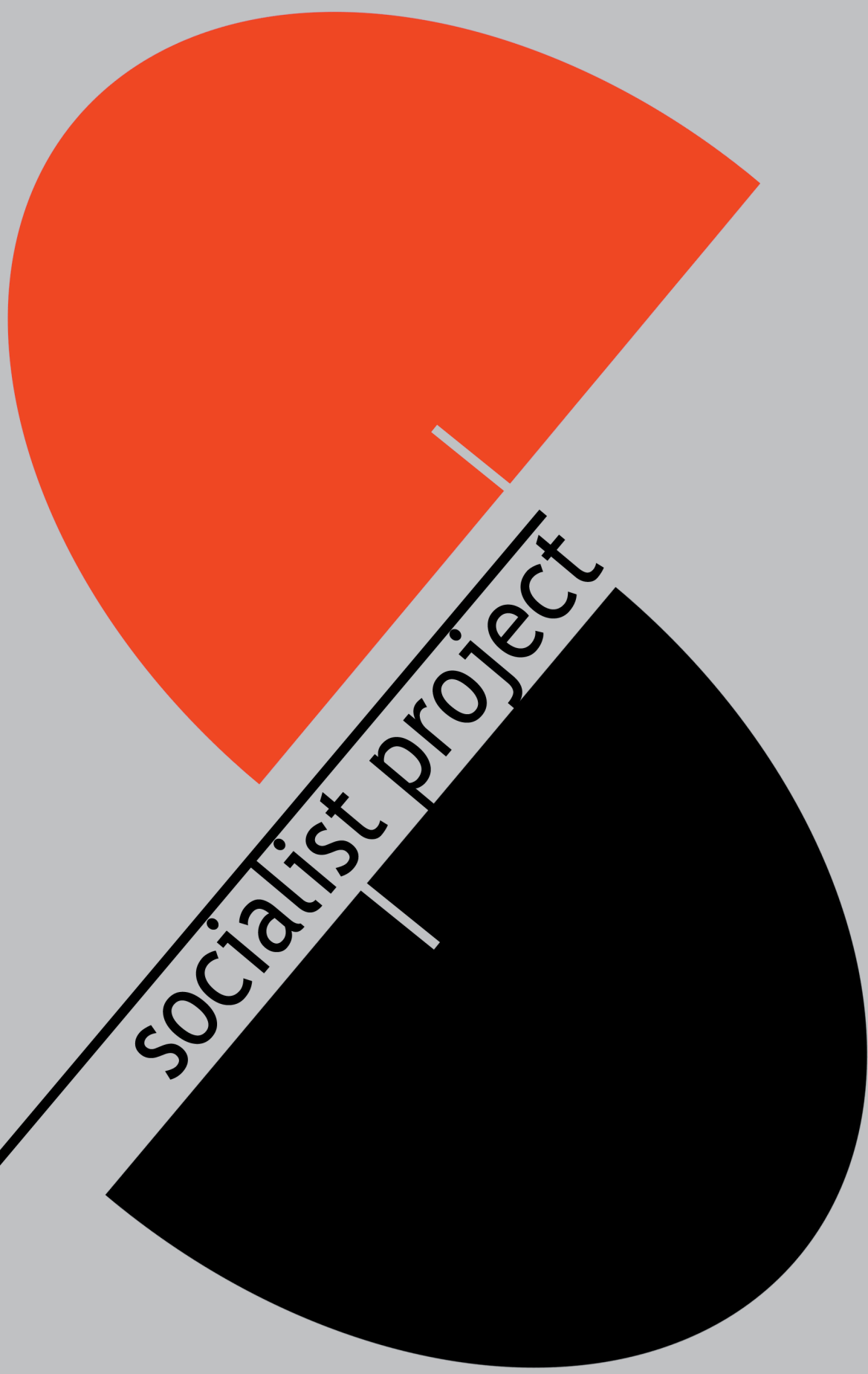


founding statement



About The Socialist Project

At a meeting in Toronto in the fall of 2000, some 750 activists responded to a call to “rebuild the left” by developing a structured movement against capitalism. This call for a new political formation that would be “more than a movement, less than a party” was similar to other initiatives in Canada and around the world that have been undertaken as the traditional organizations of the political left have waned.

The call was based on the understanding that the discovery and creation of a new kind of left politics is not going to be easy. It was in this spirit that, when the first Toronto initiative faltered, a group of independent socialists continued to meet with other activists across Ontario to try learn from the experience and find a way forward. The group asked hard questions about how radically different from that first initiative a new political formation of the left would need to be. And they exchanged ideas and assessments of the political situation in Canada and the world, both to focus debate and to arrive at areas of political agreement.

Out of this process—a ray of sunshine during the long winter of 2003—the political statement now in your hands was completed, launching the Socialist Project as a new political formation on the Canadian left.

For further information on the Socialist Project, check our website at www.socialistproject.ca or contact us at [<socialistproject@hotmail.com>](mailto:socialistproject@hotmail.com)

THE SOCIALIST PROJECT

Our political project is defined by the struggle to move beyond capitalism. To be for equality and democracy, to be for justice and solidarity, to be for the end of all oppressions and the full and universal development of individual and collective capacities—to be for all of this is to be against capitalism.

What we have come to see—capitalism has been our able teacher—is that a market economy means a market society; that the class distribution and organization of property means the class distribution of freedoms; that the sale of our labour-power in a capitalist labour market is a relationship of exploitation and inequality; that racial and gender oppressions sustain the social relations and inequalities reproduced by capitalism; that the capitalist appropriation of nature degrades the quality and diversity of life; that the commodification of culture means the diminution of both individuality and community; and that the drive to remove barriers to the ceaseless expansion of capital and profits translates into barriers to the realization of our needs and potentials.

We do not propose an easy politics for defeating capitalism or claim a ready alternative to take its place. We resist out of necessity and support the resistance of others out of solidarity. This resistance creates spaces of hope, and an activist hope is the first step to discovering a new socialist politics. Through the struggles of that politics—struggles informed by collective analysis and reflection—alternatives will emerge.

The scale of what we are up against demands a politics that maximizes mobilization and democratizes knowledge. Today there is a great urgency, as well as opportunity, to develop such a politics. But it will not sustain itself unless its internal relations—the relationships amongst its activists—are based on the greatest mutual respect as we build a new collective culture and capacity to discuss, debate, take decisions, administer, struggle, and dream.

Global Capitalism and the Left

The Socialist Project seeks to bring together individual workers and intellectuals, as well as groups and movements, who share an anti-capitalist orientation. Today, *any* vision beyond capitalism has largely been removed from the public agenda and discourse. “Globalization” has not only affected the everyday conditions of our lives, but has also affected our common-sense understanding of what is possible. The fragmentary politics that remains cannot mobilize or widen our social horizons, and has led to the mass withdrawal of working-class people from even participating in voting. Our immediate aim is to make politics matter, to affect the scope of what we debate publicly, to remind ourselves that our society, and, indeed, capitalism, can be transformed through collective action. A democratic economy and society is not a utopian dream but a realistic and necessary alternative to the inequities of the existing social order.

Capitalism’s emergence some three centuries ago met with immediate resistance to its economic logic and social consequences. The resistance took many forms, including an anti-capitalism that challenged the new social relations themselves. Anti-colonial and anti-slavery movements also arose in opposition to the imperialism and racism that came with the spread of capitalism’s reach around the globe. This anti-capitalist tradition, which we identify with, was further enhanced and sustained by a vision of a society based on the full and mutual development of all our potential capacities. That vision is called “socialism.”

The first attempts to implement post-capitalist alternatives (at the Paris Commune, in the Soviet Union after 1917, or in Cuba and other developing countries) have left an uneven legacy of failure, some success, and political limitations. What emerged from the end of many of these experiences has reminded us of the exploitation and corruption that is essential to the development of capitalism. Amongst the many lessons to be learned from these experiences, the most important one is about the inseparability of socialism, the struggle for equality in all its forms, and the fullest and deepest expansion of democracy at every level.

Our political commitments are thus necessarily internationalist. Yet despite its global reach, capitalism still depends on nation-states and ruling classes. This means that transforming global capitalism—and contributing to a fundamental international redistribution of resources—is conditional on overcoming the power of capital in the nation-states and local communities in which we live. We can only lay the basis for the popular rule and collective ownership that are inte-

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gral to socialism by expanding our political capacities where we live and work.

To this end, and given the diverse regions and nations of Canada, our activities must be rooted in building *locally based* anti-capitalist social movements in our unions, workplaces, and communities. Fighting a workplace closure today means fighting against the global mobility of capital. But winning such a fight means securing community and workplace rights over investment, as well as establishing national and international controls over capital's mobility.

The capitalist economic system must constantly expand its profitability and incorporate new peoples, territories, and ecologies into its logic. Capitalism must continually appropriate the wealth of nature—accumulate or die. Capitalism discards its toxins and wastes, squanders resources, destroys and fragments wildlife habitats, damages public health, and destabilizes eco-systems the world over. To combat the ecological dumping of toxins in communities desperate for work depends upon workers and ecologists fighting for responsible production and stewardship of local ecologies, as well as establishing national regulatory regimes banning trade in pollutants and rejecting the extension of private property rights in international trade agreements.

In other words, taking on capitalism today means thinking, mobilizing, and acting locally, nationally, and globally.

The nature of the political structures we need cannot be separated from our goals. Our goal is to replace capitalism: to end the anti-democratic control by a minority ruling class that monopolizes the means of production, finance, distribution, and communication, and dominates our political structures and thus blocks our ability to address our individual needs, shape our communities, and communicate with each other. Our preparation will have to be profound, our structures will need to be thoroughly democratic, and our horizons must be focused on the deep transformations necessary to replace the existing class system and social order.

The struggle against capitalism requires the active participation of working people. The working class today is much more than the traditional industrial proletariat. In a mature capitalist economy, the public and private service sectors are a large segment of the working class. And workers comprise men and women, people of colour, different sexualities, the abled and the physically challenged, and the employed and the unemployed.

The Impasse of Working Class Politics

Women have confronted many forms of oppression from the institutions and ideology of patriarchy that reproduce pay, occupational, and childcare inequalities, as well as the terrible realities of sexual assault and domestic violence. Racism emerged with modern slavery and colonialism. It spread as capitalism developed to encompass many different forms of segregating the labour market and society. Racial discrimination leaves its mark in many areas—access to housing, inequalities in policing and sentencing, and impediments to occupational advancement. And discriminatory practices with respect to sexual differences have often scarred personal and familial relations, left gays and lesbians closeted and marginalized, and made them vulnerable before the law and in the labour market. Workers need to be united across all these social identities, and struggle for greater equality amongst ourselves.

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The labour movement is crucial to this movement. Unions have long provided workers with a common voice, organizational skills, and the confidence to bargain collectively with their employers and to connect this with struggles for political change. The neoliberal assault on the working class and their unions undermined past gains and narrowed working-class expectations. However, with some notable exceptions, Canadian unions have been less than effective in standing up to the neoliberal assault and uniting the working class in all its dimensions. All too often we have seen union staff and elected leadership focus more on power and career, resulting in a more conservative and passive unionism. The reversal of recent defeats requires extending the scope of unions—rebuilding our unions as centres of working-class life and examples of the fullest democratic participation and community mobilization.

Social democratic parties have a historic link with the labour movement and have always included elements that share our commitment to socialism. But for the most part, social democracy today accepts the inevitability of capitalism, and defines politics in terms of modifying rather than transforming and ultimately moving beyond capitalism. Indeed, social democracy increasingly makes the objective of politics competition with other workers and societies. It expects too little of working-class people and the development of their capacities—“give us your vote, some time, and some money,” it says, “and we will take care of the politics.” It thus has little need for establishing a range of activities and institutions through which to conduct struggles beyond the parliamentary electoral machine.

We represent a different project. In terms of goals and structures, our socialist organization will be distinct. There may be a very good case for trying to make parties like the New Democratic Party more radical in their policies, more democratic internally, and more open to the new movements. We may share particular interests and join in particular campaigns. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, these efforts will only result in a party that is perhaps better able to address *reform*, not *socialism*. The immediate and over-riding issue for us is not that of “improving” the NDP or developing an alternative electoral party, but of addressing what is missing in Canadian politics: discovering the kind of politics that builds towards placing an anti-capitalist alternative on the agenda.

A commitment to anti-capitalist politics means a commitment to activism. We are not a debating society, nor do we want to farm our politics out to professionals. We need to build the capacity in all of us to debate, write, share mental labour, lead, and organize. We look to a politics that extends beyond houses of parliament and demands more than getting out the vote every few years. An activist politics reaches into our households, workplaces, schools, and communities; it extends the challenge to corporate power into the streets; it constantly expands the number of people involved and deepens the involvement of those already active; and it builds equality in the movement, across gender, race, and sexualities, as we struggle for a more egalitarian society.

Yet activism alone is not enough. Without a serious attempt to think through the goals and strategies behind our actions, activity may be misdirected, energy wasted, and enthusiasm exhausted. Ideas express our goals and direct our actions. Social analysis and debate helps us understand larger changes in the world and contributes to determining what kind of demands and actions are needed and possible at any particular moment. We need to continually re-evaluate our successes and failures: successes are always partial, defeats always pregnant with lessons. We have to assess the ruling classes and parties that defend capitalism and the existing social order in Canada and Québec, anticipating the range of reactions they might have and how this will affect our own tactics and strategies.

Political organizations are simply structures that bring actions and ideas together and allow us to build on them. They are forums for discussing, debating, learning and making democratic decisions. They are

Anti-Capitalist Politics

Guiding Principles of

1. Anti-capitalism

We oppose a society whose social relations are formed around the private ownership and control of finance, the means of production and communications by a minority, and the corresponding commodification and sale of labour-power by the majority for their livelihoods.

2. Socialism

Socialism means establishing new social relations that support the full and mutual development of all our potential capacities. This means overcoming all forms of oppression, including class, race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, state power, imperialism, and any other form of subordination. To make genuine democracy possible in all facets of our social lives, it is necessary to establish collective control of the means of communication, production, finance, and distribution.

3. Internationalism

We are part of an international movement confronting an increasingly internationalized capitalism. Imperialism is a structural feature of this system, producing global oppositions of wealth and poverty, power and domination. International solidarity must challenge imperialist policies at home, oppose imperialist wars and the militarization of international relations, redistribute global resources to equalize development capacities, and support the struggles of workers and the oppressed internationally.

4. Ecology

Moving beyond capitalism is, in our view, a necessary condition for confronting the ecological crises we face, ending productivism and consumption as the central organizers of social life, establishing ecologically responsible production to meet human needs, improving public health in all its dimensions, and sustaining the natural and built environment for present and future generations.

5. Democracy

A genuine internationalism can only stand on genuine democracy at both the national and local levels. We are committed to expanding the scale and scope of democracy from the local and the national to the global, and reducing the scale and scope of the fundamentally undemocratic capitalist market, state, and social relations. We must develop popular democratic capacities through new institutions of collective deliberation and representation, and extend democratic practices into collective administration of the economy, workplaces, public administration, schools, hospitals, cultural institutions and other spheres of social life.

the Socialist Project

6. Class Politics

Building and developing an anti-capitalist move-

ment revolves around developing a viable working-class politics. People who sell their labour power—whether they work in the public, private or non-profit sectors—have the collective potential to challenge the present social system and pose an alternative to capitalism. This is a struggle that occurs within and outside of workplaces, in the sphere of reproduction as well as production, and amongst the employed and unemployed.

7. Anti-oppression

Specific forms of oppression, such as sexism, racism, and homophobia, have their own patterns of social inequalities apart from social class even while lived through class. We oppose all forms of oppression and support the struggles of the oppressed on their own terms. Their struggle for equality is fundamental to any genuine solidarity among workers, and crucial to developing democratic capacities and building a socialist future.

8. Self-determination

The principle that nations have the right to self-determination in the exercise of their democratic sovereignty has two crucial and distinct dimensions in the Canadian context, deriving from the historic European oppression of the aboriginal peoples and Quebec's conquest by the British empire. In acknowledging Quebec's right to self-determination, this means being prepared to facilitate sovereignty-association. And in recognizing the right of Aboriginals to self-government, this means supporting their economic development, including the just settlement of land-claims issues.

9. Educated Activism

An anti-capitalist alternative can only be built through the broadest kind of activism: in our workplaces, communities, streets, and, eventually, through the integration of parliamentary activity in our politics. This activism cannot be separated from ideas—from constant self-education to social analysis, evaluation of activity, and discussion of tactics and strategies.

10. Capacity Building

We can only be effective in making our actions and ideas cumulative, developing unity and an alternative culture, and building our political capacities if we create appropriate internal structures. Such structures include a membership base, procedures for democratic decision-making and accountability, mechanisms that maximize participation in all activities, forums for the exchange of ideas and experiences, and the initiation of new kinds of activism. We intend to contribute to developing new patterns of cooperation among the broad political left.

mechanisms for making our gains cumulative: no movement can grow if actions come and go, if mobilization and events periodically flare up and just as quickly flare out. It is the combination of actions, ideas, and structures that contribute to a collective memory, an emerging culture, the accumulation of political capacities, a confident and concrete sense of building something that can be sustained and steadily strengthened.

Social Movements and Political Struggle

We need to build an organization of the left that sees itself as more than a single-issue movement but, at this moment, is less than a party. We do not think that movement politics alone—given what we are up against—can by itself adequately address the kinds of structures and strategies we need. Political parties are needed precisely because we need to make the connections across movements, to form a common struggle for social transformation across the diversity of particular struggles, and to develop more generally alternate responses to the concentration of economic and political power of modern capitalism. Our parties need to be about developing democratic capacities, building genuine socialist power to defend our ideas and past struggles, and advancing collective, participatory solutions to social problems. At the same time, we do not think that jumping prematurely to the formation of a party is the answer.

We admire the energy, courage, and creativity of movement politics. But our experience in Canada has convinced us that single-issue politics, coalition politics, street politics, and the politics of the spectacle—however much they have contributed to reviving a new sense of possibilities—are not enough. If, as the global social justice movement is increasingly emphasizing, the underlying issue is not just social inequalities, or trade, or ecology, or justice but capitalism itself, then this carries implications for developing a broader, more structured politics where collective interests and capacities can form out of more specific ones.

If a party is to be eventually formed, we think it should be the outcome—not the starting point—of a sustained period of working, discussing, arguing, and learning together.

Why then not form a new party? Because in principle we do not want to proclaim the formation of a party before we have talked to others about what such a party might look like and what its role might be. We see the working class—because of its history, organizational strength, resources, and strategic location within production and society—and because the vast majority of us are dependent upon the sale of our

labour-power—as central to any socialist project. A party would have to play a major role in shaping the various sections of the working class into a political force with a common identity in a common project to challenge the capitalist system. We therefore consider it a pre-condition to any party-building to establish a working-class base that can participate in the process of deciding the kind of party we need.

If a party is to be eventually formed, we think it should be the outcome—not the starting point—of a sustained period of working, discussing, arguing, and learning together. It must emerge out of our political struggle against class exploitation and in the struggle against the sexism, racism, and homophobia that often divide us. We must develop a clearer sense of how this party would be different than other parties in terms of goals, structures, and the political capacities to be built. As we grow, new and difficult questions about organization, strategy, and objectives will be raised. What we will eventually become therefore remains an open process that can only be determined by a politics that begins to define and make our own future, free of the constrained vision of democracy and equality that capitalism provides.

Market and state formation in the second half of the nineteenth century placed Canada within the centre of the world economy, initially as part of the British empire, with high output level but with a dependent industrial structure. Canada moved into the richest tier of capitalist economies by the early twentieth century based on increased productivity brought about by technology borrowed from the leading capitalist countries. Canada also developed by extending the scale of the capitalist market westward and northward by marginalizing the Aboriginal populations and thereby increasing the quantity of land and resources available for accumulation, and by immigration increasing the size of the working classes to be exploited.

The strength of the postwar boom carried Canada along to even higher output levels, now within the confines of the hegemonic American empire. This development extended the market even further into the remotest regions of North America in order to supply the resources to fuel the production and consumption processes of the world's most productive and wasteful economies. It reinforced the dependence of Canadian capitalists on foreign technology and capital as the price for remaining in the capitalist core.

Situating the Socialist Project Today: Canada, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism

Neoliberalism is the way the ruling class rules today, and is the fundamental obstacle we confront in our struggle.

The economic crisis that ended the postwar boom in the 1970s was met not with a reversal of this development trajectory but with a further avowal of it. The Canadian state and ruling classes incorporated Canada within a continental trading bloc through the North American

Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Since the 1980s, free trade has intensified international competitive pressure on jobs, wages, social policy, and the natural environment.

The consequences of this model of development are dismal: growing unemployment and little job security; low productivity gain and faltering manufacturing capacity; foreign-dominated ownership patterns; resource depletion in many sectors, including accessible hydrocarbons, fisheries, forests, and minerals; increased ecological dumping of wastes and toxins; and a marked curtailment of democratic sovereignty.

The political agencies of neoliberalism in Canada were the Mulroney Conservatives in the 1980s and the Chrétien Liberals in the 1990s. And even ruling social democratic provincial parties have had little success in reversing this policy pattern, and have ended up governing as neoliberals. These policies have included free trade, deregulation, social policy cuts, regressive tax changes, privatization, and the increased policing of the poor and the marginalized.

Yet neoliberalism is much more than a particular set of policies and political ideology. It is also the political power of international capital, public sector commercialization, the common-sense of the day propagated by the popular media, and, especially, the glue binding the Canadian and international ruling classes to the American empire. The existing state cannot simply be used by any new electoral coalition nor bypassed in forwarding political alternatives. Neoliberalism is the way the ruling class rules today, and is the fundamental obstacle we confront in our struggle. But its excesses are also an opportunity to organize against capitalism.

The new geo-military balance of power that has evolved with the consolidation of neoliberalism and globalization is a pressing political concern we must immediately confront. One of the problems for global capitalism, and the American empire in particular, is that certain strategic sections of the world have remained outside the political orbit of the imperial powers even if they are integrated into the world market. As long as the Soviet Union existed, military intervention to discipline wayward political regimes risked leading to a larger confrontation. The balance of nuclear threat—with all its horrors and obscenities—served to limit imperial forays into contested zones of influence. The collapse of

the Soviet Union in the early 1990s meant a phase of “new imperialism” and military interventionism. Direct intervention to restructure these regions in ways more favourable to global capitalism began.

The subsequent imperial interventions in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere—both with and without United Nations backing—have been invoked in the name of human rights, but the infringement on state sovereignty has clearly been about political discipline and economic subordination. While these interventions have allowed Europe and the United States to carve out new spheres of influence, they have also raised the prospect of new rivalries between the two.

The United States has aggressively asserted—with increasing degrees of unilateralism and disregard for postwar international norms and agreements—its military and political dominance to restore and enhance its economic position in the world. Europe, like the lesser Asian powers of Japan and China, has had only a limited capacity to offer a political alternative and none as a military strategy. The terrorist strikes of September 11, 2001, in New York and Washington, D.C., provided the opportunity for the American state to launch its “war on terror” and mobilize its own population first against Afghanistan and then against Iraq. These states in the Middle and Far East are just the first on the American agenda. Others will surely follow. The new Bush doctrine of the singular American right to launch “wars of pre-emption” to protect its vital interests and security is an extremely dangerous mandate that provides no limits on the reach of the American empire, subordinating and marginalizing international agreements and institutions—and even other capitalist powers - to American foreign policy.

The war in Iraq is the latest invocation of the new American doctrine of the right to pre-emptive strikes. This raises four particular issues for the socialist project today. First, it means joining the broadest possible alliance against the new doctrine and the new imperialism. Second, it means standing up to American pressures to bring the Canadian government into its new imperial, militarist coalition. This also means challenging the hypocritical argument, endorsed by sections of the Canadian ruling class, that opposition to the American invasion of Iraq will lead to American economic retaliation—in other words, that narrow economic self-interest should trump concerns over American pre-emptive unilateral intervention in another country. Third, we need to address the domestic racism that inevitably

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flows from the mobilization for such wars and prepare for the wider American-led attacks on civil liberties and oppositional rights. And fourth, we need to deepen our analyses and educational work to further expose the new visibility of the American empire, the new imperialism, and its roots in capitalist competition and social relations.

An effective socialist internationalism today needs to build a strong movement within our own national and local communities, the historical and concrete spaces of class struggle and power. When we resist at the national or local levels, we reinforce and inspire—as opposed to under-

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mine by pursuing international competitiveness—the possibilities for resistance elsewhere. We can only transform international capitalism—and its institutional manifestations in organizations like the World Trade Organization or the International Monetary Fund or the G8—if we can first transform the national states we confront, in our case, Canada. Even with growing economic internationalization, the state remains the basic site for the defence and expansion of property rights, contracts, rules of competition, the monetary system, and class formation—that is, for the political and social reproduction of capitalism.

It is in the context of the struggle against global capitalism that we need to raise the issue of democracy and define the meaning of ‘democratic sovereignty’. Democratic sovereignty is to be distinguished from any temporary alliance with a national capitalist class, since the course of globalization has restructured capitalist classes in ways that have definitively separated them from progressive national struggles. Nor is it about fighting for the autonomy of nation states, since the role of existing nation states in furthering globalization, engaging in war-making, and exercising coercion in defense of private interests, makes them part of the problem, not the solution. National autonomy is illusory as capitalism necessarily exists—and has always existed—as a world market. Rather, the local and national dimensions of such an international struggle mean we must work to transform the Canadian state to gain control over our lives, expand democratic capacities, and explore new forms of collective ownership as the most profound contribution the socialist project can make to challenging global capitalism and imperialism.

