

A SOCIALIST PROJECT REVIEW

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Relay



POST-ELECTION COVERAGE
TARIQ ALI ON VENEZUELA

LESSONS FROM QUEBEC
SCOTTISH SOCIALISM

Interview with Tariq Ali

Venezuela: Changing the World by Taking Power

By: Claudia Jardim and Jonah Gindin



Tariq Ali is a veteran political activist, filmmaker, and author of numerous books, both fiction and non-fiction. He was born in Lahore, Pakistan, and now lives and works in London, England where he is an editor of the British journal *New Left Review*. His most recent political texts include *The Clash of Fundamentalisms* (Verso, 2002) and *Bush in Babylon: Recolonizing Iraq* (Verso, 2003). Claudia Jardim and Jonah Gindin talked with him during a recent trip of his to Caracas, where he participated in

the presentation of a statement of solidarity from numerous Brazilian intellectuals.

How do you explain the explosion in social movements against neoliberalism in Latin America?

I think the reason for this is that Latin America was used as a laboratory by the United States for a long, long time. Everything the US wanted was experimented in Latin America first. When they wanted military—on the political

level—when they wanted to crush popular movements by unleashing military dictatorships they did it in Latin America first: Brazil, Argentina, Chile; three of the most brutal dictatorships we have seen. Then, after the collapse of the communist enemy, they relaxed on the political front but they got Latin America in a grip economically, and they said ‘this is the only way forward.’ We can summarize it like this: the laboratory of the American Empire is the first to rebel against the Empire. So many many different and interesting processes are happening in Latin America and I think where the left is weak is in its inability to bring these together and to refound the Latin American left.

What began to happen in Latin America is a process of de-industrialization; foreign investments coming in. In the most classic examples were Chile under Pinochet, then Brazil under Cardoso and Argentina under successive governments. They de-industrialized the country, they thought that the country could function in a bubble—an economic bubble created by a

(Continued on page 17)

Out & About

Left Electoralism?

On Thursday June 17, more than one-hundred Toronto socialists gathered to share perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of parliamentary democracy, voting, and the NDP in Canada.

Herman Rosenfeld of the Socialist Project addressed to the political limitations of the NDP as a genuine working class party and commented on the historic failure of social-democratic parties as vehicles for radical social change.

Sima Zerihy of the New Socialist Group pointing out how electoral politics and the Layton-inspired NDP could function as forces of marginalization and co-optation. She argued that we need to focus on building an anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic working class movement.

Though Abbi Bakan of the International Socialists called for a pragmatic and strategic vote for the NDP, she was mindful of the limits of electoral politics and social-democratic parties.

Corven Russel, a writer for Rabble.ca and agent of the NDP-amalgamated New Politics Initiative, argued that we need more dialogue between groups on the Left and new theories of politics.

Miguel Figueroa, leader of the Communist Party of Canada, advised the forum’s participants to focus their attacks, not on each other and the NDP, but on the real enemies of the day: the Conservative party and neo-liberalism. Figueroa observed that many committed socialists’ strategically vote for the social-democratic NDP rather than the Communist Party of Canada, which is clear about its revolutionary interests.

Socialist History Project Launched

Last month, www.socialisthistory.ca was unveiled. The website provides a chance to read previously inaccessible materials documenting socialist history in Canada.

The Socialist History Project is headed by Ian Angus, the author of *Canadian Bolsheviks*, a look at the early Communist

Party of Canada. While the website provides documents and essays from that early period (and before), there is a generous selection from subsequent decades.

The website is devoted to “documenting the revolutionary socialist tradition in Canada.” “We aim to publish three types of material,” Angus says. “First, statements, reports and articles on key political issues and trends, written by revolutionary socialists over the past century. Second, essays by historians about the revolutionary left. And third, reminiscences and memoirs by participants in the socialist movement.”

Angus believes that the material he’s making available, “is important not just to historians and archivists, but to the new generation of radicalizing youth.”

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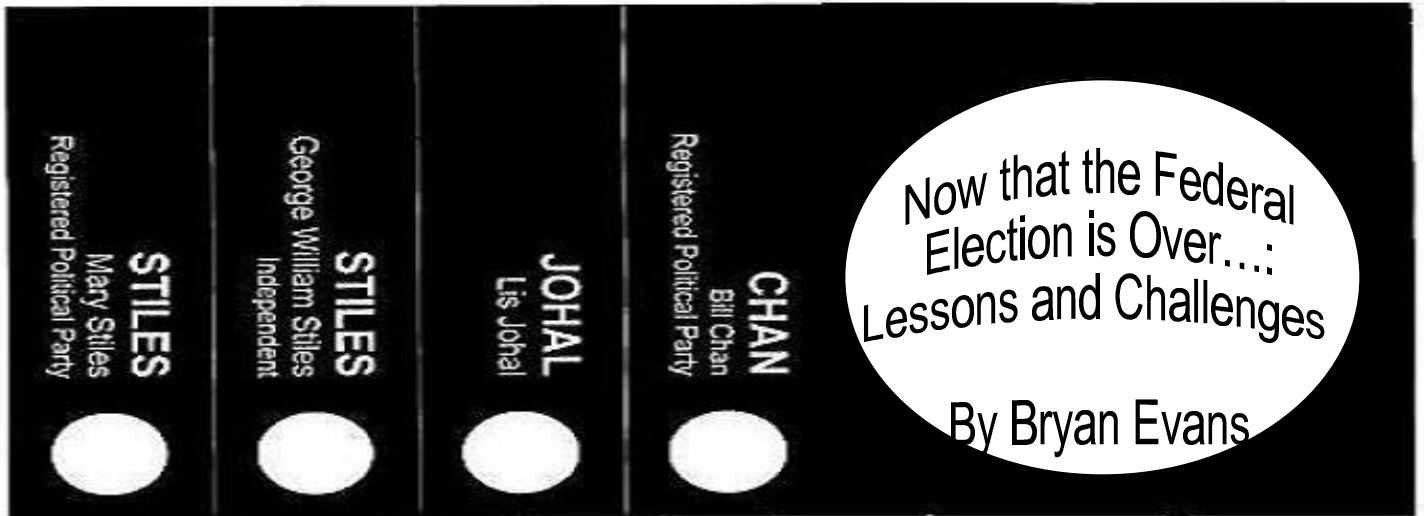
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About Socialist Project

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. 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, the Socialist Project was launched as a new political formation of the Canadian left.



In the immediate aftermath of June 28th, what has emerged is a widely held view, most directly stated on the editorial pages of Toronto's 'eye weekly' magazine, that this election resulted in 'a really strong vote for social democracy'. In essence this boils down to a view where the combined votes for the NDP, the BQ and the Greens is seen to represent a significant progressive bloc. The Liberals, in turn, have been pushed to retrieve their social progressive/social democratic values as a result. There is a qualitatively important lesson in this tactical shift to a progressive social liberalism. Martin and the Liberals, for their part, have emerged as the defenders of Canadian values – essentially code for diversity and social programs.

The Liberal deathbed retrieval of social liberalism was nothing more than vulgar opportunism but it was an opportunism in response to a measurable loss of support to the NDP. In the final days of the campaign Martin appealed, perhaps pleaded would be more accurate, to voters leaning toward the New Democrats, arguing that only the Liberals could defeat the Conservatives and thus protect social programs. By all accounts it seems to have worked. The Liberal success within this context and the Conservative failure to 'unite the right', defined as having failed to win a level of popular support equal to the combined votes of Alliance and PC's, provides a rather stark contrast to the dynamic of the debate in the United States.

As for the NDP, BQ and the Greens we see simply various accommodations with the neoliberal orthodoxy. No one program suggested a rupture with capitalism. While the tactics employed by the

Liberals in the final weeks of the campaign appealed, and were designed so, to those who were discomfited to some lesser or greater degree with the project of dismantling anything of a public nature, the actual policy prescriptions of all the parties displayed a consensus of the political establishment in accepting neoliberal hegemony.

The New Democrats, as the official social democratic party, provide the clearest example of this. It was not simply the early attempts to attract progressive Liberals to run under the party label but the real or apparent abandonment of the most 'radical' propositions coming from that party. Such propositions as the abrogation of NAFTA and withdrawal from NATO, but in addition the shameless silence of Canada's 'labour party' on fundamental workers' issues such as the protection of pensions and collective bargaining. All this while the business pages of papers throughout the world speak of a pension crisis – which of course will be resolved on the backs of workers. Did anyone note how quickly the New Democrats abandoned their call for an inheritance tax? The NDP continues to move away from 'labourism' as it constructs a what it clearly wishes to be a new political alliance of urban social liberals advocating responsible business investment practices. Apart from Layton himself, the new alliance strategy failed. What the NDP did benefit from was a resurgence of class-based voting in regional pockets of the country. NDP gains largely tended to be in seats and regions where there is a tradition of working class support for the 'labour party'. In the north-end of Winnipeg, Windsor, Hamilton, and northern Ontario New Democrats won seats or were

competitive for the first time in some years. With a bit more momentum and different political and organizational strategies and tactics it was entirely possible for this to have been a very dramatic night for the NDP.

The reality is that it must have been a very bitter night for the architects of the new alliance strategy. Why was this so? There is a lesson in wins in Timmins-James Bay and Sault Ste. Marie and losses in Trinity-Spadina and Beaches-Woodbine. The strategy of new alliances, it would appear, was not built on a very reliable political base. Sarah Polley may be very cool but her public endorsement of Olivia Chow did not result in much that is tangible. Perhaps with much less flash, Winnipeg's north end delivered seats to the NDP. Downtown Toronto, save one, did not. Despite the post-modern make-over the NDP as a multi-class party, workers appear to have in some significant numbers returned to supporting the New Democrats. More may well have been possible but that would have meant a different strategy. In this respect the politics of the new alliance strategy requires more investigation. On the face it, the strategy was in part meant to include the social movements. Yet, beyond the health coalitions, neither presence nor support appear to have been generated. Further notables stemming from election 2004 include a record low voter turnout of 60% speaks volumes. In comparative terms this puts Canadian voter turnout toward the bottom of the scale of 'wealthy' countries besting only the United States. That 40% choose not to participate even in the most minimal fashion reflects a deepening alienation with not just the political system but the

participate even in the most minimal fashion reflects a deepening alienation with not just the political system but the political economy as a whole. While we must await the hard number crunching of who voted and who didn't it doesn't require a lot of data to know that the most marginalized are much less likely to vote. However, there is a growing pattern of non-participation among all income, occupational and social groups. It cannot go without noting that all political parties failed to mobilize the most disenfranchised. Why? The simple answer is that three decades of neoliberal restructuring has built a lived reality for most where state intervention and provision of public goods is dramatically diminished and consequently less relevant in daily terms. It is a casual but still interesting observation to note that in those countries where there is a robust and legitimate public sector voter participations tends toward the higher end.

In this country region is a complex dimension of life which intersects with class, linguistic and broadly defined social and economic opportunities. This new parliament reflects rather dramatically the deepening of divisions and polarization along these lines. None of the parties offers an analysis and vision to ameliorate let alone roll back this troubling scenario of a sharply divided society. Instead, what a plurality of Canadian voters did was to opt to reinstate to government a party which in the final weeks of the election spoke of vague Canadian values (??) and deftly characterized the Conservatives as not being in tune with these mainstream values. Exactly how these values are applied in policy terms remains to be seen but their plastic quality provides much room to wiggle of which we will assuredly see much in the next months. For the socialist Left the challenge is to find the means both organizationally and ideologically to build on the small

beachheads resulting from election 2004. Three significant developments are worth exploring further. First, the revival, though modest, of working class support for the New Democrats speaks to the potential for deepening a class politics in this country. Second, a widely held, though uncertain and contradictory rejection of the worst neoliberalism can offer points to the possibility for building a movement which questions neoliberalism rather than seeks an accommodation with it. And third, the possibility that this parliament will place on the policy agenda some important issues such as rebuilding and reinvesting in public goods and services, urban infrastructure, sustainable economic development and a rejection of militarism. This will provide the socialist Left with greater credibility in advancing a vision of real transformation. However, to even test this hypothesis will require a great deal of work and creativity on our part.

The 2004 election and the Left: Some lessons from Quebec

by Richard Fidler

A few thoughts on the June 28 federal election, focused on the Quebec results and their implications for the left in the Rest of Canada.

1. The sovereignty movement is here to stay.

This was the fourth consecutive federal election in which the Bloc Québécois has emerged as the dominant party in Francophone Quebec. And the sixth consecutive election in which the federal Liberals, Canada's "natural governing party", failed to win a plurality let alone a majority among Quebec's Francophone voters. The Bloc received 300,000 more votes than it got in 2000; rumours of its imminent demise proved greatly exaggerated.

Quebec has produced nationalist splinter parties in the past: Henri Bourassa's Parti Nationaliste, the anticonscription Bloc Populaire in the 1940s, Réal Caouette's rural Créditistes. But none with the longevity and popular support of the Bloc Québécois, not to mention the Parti québécois. Throughout most of the 20th century, until the 1980s, Quebecers, as a minority people within Canada, tended to vote overwhelmingly with the party in

power in Ottawa. That was how they could exert maximum influence within the federal system of government, the reasoning went. Now, however, the myth of "French power" within the federal government has been largely abandoned. One obvious explanation for this change in traditional voting patterns, of course, lies in the fallout from the unilateral patriation of the Constitution in 1982 and the failure to repair that error (Meech, Charlottetown). The roots go much deeper, however. During the Trudeau years, many Francophone Quebecers were able to overlook his visceral hatred of Quebec nationalism because his governments, initially at least, offered some real hope of improvement in their status within Canada, through such things as the official languages policy and repeated (albeit unsuccessful) attempts to develop a made-in-Canada constitution that would be acceptable to Quebec. But since the early 1980s federalism — meaning now the constitutional status quo — has been on the defensive in Quebec. Federal politics in Quebec now more closely resemble the alignments that have developed on the provincial level since the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, the PQ and

now the BQ building on the ongoing strength of the pro-sovereignty sentiment. Quebec's alienation from the federal regime in the wake of the Meech debacle triggered the collapse of the Tories and now, following the disclosures over the "sponsorship" campaign — with its contemptuous approach to Quebec referendum laws and Québécois political allegiances — has reduced the Liberals to minority government status.

2. Once again, NDP hopes of a Quebec breakthrough are dashed.

The NDP's vote in Quebec, while increasing by 95,000, remained well below 10% of the total. And some of its best scores were for candidates known for their pro-sovereignty views, such as Omar Aktouf (14%), a leader of the Union des forces progressistes (UFP). Until recently, Jack Layton and his Quebec adjutant Pierre Ducasse had banked their hopes for big NDP gains on what they perceived as waning support for sovereignty and with it a decline and eventual disappearance of the Bloc — just as the PQ's decline in the mid-1980s, when it dropped the sovereignty goal and embraced the "beau risque"

strategy with the federal Tories, resulted in a brief surge in the provincial NDP's support in Quebec. But when the PQ reoriented toward sovereignty under Jacques Parizeau, the Quebec NDP collapsed; its remnants are now in the sovereigntist UFP.

The Quebec national question has plagued the NDP from its inception. At its 1961 founding convention, attended by some 300 delegates from Quebec, the new party adopted a position that recognized Quebec as a distinct "nation". Even then this was controversial; Eugene Forsey, then the research director for the Canadian Labour Congress, quit the party on the floor of the convention over that nod to reality. Within a few years, faced with the chauvinism of the party's federal leadership and some key members, mainly Anglophone, in Montreal, most of the party's supporters in Quebec had left, first to form the Parti Socialiste du Québec, then to join the Parti Québécois or one of the groupuscules further to the left. Since then, with the notable exception of some goodwill earned by the party's opposition to the War Measures occupation of Quebec in 1970, the NDP's support in Quebec has been inversely proportional to the fortunes of the sovereigntist movement.

The party's claim to support Quebec's right to self-determination has been constantly belied by its practice. In 1982, in the face of unanimous opposition from Quebec's National Assembly, the NDP parliamentary caucus supported Trudeau's reform of the Constitution with its Charter of Rights specifically designed to frustrate Quebec legislation in defence of the French language. In 1992, the party campaigned for the Charlottetown Accord, rejected by a majority of Quebec voters. And in 2000, its MPs voted with only two exceptions for the Clarity Act, Parliament's arrogant declaration that it – and it alone – would decide whether Quebec had a right to negotiate its exit from Confederation.

For a moment, during the recent campaign, it looked as if the federal NDP had finally got it: in Baie Comeau, Pierre Ducas at his side, Jack Layton denounced the Clarity Act. But Layton's statement was promptly denounced by both NDP provincial premiers and leading members of his parliamentary caucus. Layton quickly backtracked: the Act was "ancient history", it was time to move on. And its repeal was not included in Layton's conditions for possible support to a minority Liberal

government.

The NDP's 66-page platform had one sentence referring to the Quebec national question: it called for "recognizing the fundamental differences that constitute Quebec being a nation within Canada and working with Quebec to obtain common objectives with equitable outcomes, with the option of Quebec opting out of new federal programs with compensation to pursue common objectives and standards in a provincial program." The emphasis throughout was on the need to enforce "common objectives and standards" — without even a hint of recognition that many of the planks in the platform are matters over which Quebec has or seeks

and activists in Quebec who are in most cases supporters of a sovereign Quebec. As the NDP's record amply shows, the party's entire political culture is hostile to Quebec self-determination. It has more or less consistently tailed the Liberal conception of Canadian federalism.

The NDP's indifference, misunderstanding and sometimes downright opposition in the face of Québécois national demands and aspirations (recall Ed Broadbent's spurious claim, just prior to the PQ's 1976 election victory, that French-language communication between Francophone air crews and ground controllers jeopardized air safety?) has tended to isolate it from some of the most dynamic and progressive



exclusive jurisdiction. Quebec was treated as little more than a province like the others, albeit one requiring perhaps a bit more attention.

The source of these deficiencies is clear. Social democrats have a fundamentally benign and classless perspective on the capitalist state, which they view as the primary instrument and repository of progressive social policy. Quebec's national demands, by threatening the integrity of the central state, disrupt this perspective, even though Quebec has in recent decades enacted some of the more progressive legislation in Canada in asserting and occupying its jurisdiction. The NDP's Canadian nationalism effectively trumps Quebec nationalism and subverts the party's ability to relate to progressive grassroots social movements

forces in Quebec society. And as a direct result, its lack of support in Quebec has undermined its credibility throughout Canada as a serious contender for government in the Canadian state.

3. Strategic challenge for the left.

In English Canada, it is not just the NDP, of course, that identifies the defence and extension of social programs with preserving and strengthening the Canadian state. Virtually the entire left and progressive milieu shares this perspective to various degrees, and often reveals a remarkable inability to relate to Québécois concerns.

A notable example of the contradictory dynamics in the two nations occurred in the 1988 struggle against the original Canada-

U.S. Free Trade Agreement. The procapitalist PQ favoured the Agreement: free trade, it argued would guarantee access by a sovereign Quebec to the U.S. market, lessen Quebec's dependence on Canadian markets and investments and limit the regulatory authority of the Canadian state. Quebec trade unions were sceptical and even opposed to the deal. But nationalist-minded Quebec trade unionists and social activists were unable to relate to a movement against the deal that framed its campaign as one in defence of "Canadian sovereignty" and even named its coalition the Pro-Canada (later Action Canada) network!

When Quebec voters, under the influence of the still-pending Meech Lake Accord, helped to re-elect Mulroney's Tories, leftists in English Canada could hardly contain their anger. It was the definitive breach for many who had found it easy in the 1970s to sympathize with the radical manifestoes then being published by Quebec's unions, which for the most part had not yet become overt supporters of independence.

The divisions and hostility generated in the 1988 FTA fight graphically illustrated the need for the left to develop a strategy that could encompass Quebec self-determination and independence with English-Canadian workers' concerns and interests in a joint struggle directed against the common ruling class in the Canadian state. The failure to develop such consciousness and solidarity — replicated in both the major political confrontations (Meech, Charlottetown, the '95 referendum, the Clarity Bill) and the ongoing issues over language rights or the fiscal imbalance that strongly favours the federal government — is arguably the greatest single weakness of the working class in both nations.

Significant progress in developing such ongoing strategy and practice of solidarity would do much to help the unions and grassroots social movements in Quebec to see and develop progressive class-based options independently of the current procapitalist leadership of the nationalist movement. In any event, it should be clear by now that there will be no anticapitalist party with mass support in Quebec that does not support Quebec independence.

Developing such a strategy is not an

easy task, to be sure, but it is one that in my opinion the Socialist Project needs to address in the near future.

Our founding *Statement*, a 4,500-word document, assigned virtually no strategic weight to the Quebec national question, simply stating that "acknowledging Quebec's right to self-determination... means being prepared to facilitate sovereignty-association." The election pamphlet, *A Different Canada is Possible*, acknowledged that "Quebec has a wider claim to jurisdictional authority than other provinces" and urged the NDP to commit itself to "bargaining in good faith for a new constitutional settlement".

The support for "sovereignty-association" or a "new constitutional settlement", however, sits somewhat uneasily with the unconditional recognition of Quebec's right to self-determination. There is certainly no harm in holding out the possibility of a federalist constitutional arrangement that accommodates both nations on an equal footing. But the formulations, as they stand, appear to put the cart before the horse. What if Quebec decides it does not want some form of constitutional "association" or "settlement" with Canada?

A more strategically oriented approach, in my view, would build on the UFP's call for a democratically elected Quebec constituent assembly to adopt a Quebec constitution that would then be put to a popular vote. After all, it is Quebec a nation that is denied recognition as a nation under the Canadian Constitution, laws and courts that has the right of self-determination, not Canada, an independent country. (For reasons that are unclear to me, the UFP section of our election pamphlet omitted its call for a constituent assembly.)

Unlike the NDP, socialists do not equate the existing state structures with democracy, equality and progress. We have every interest in supporting the struggles of the Québécois for national independence if that is their choice.

And we need to flesh out and implement a strategy that incorporates the right of self-determination in all its expressions. It cannot be confined to the formal issue of separation or federation. It must include day-to-day solidarity with the Québécois fight against all manifestations of national

inequality and oppression, including the issue of language rights, repressive legislation, inequitable tax policies, etc. The recent columns by UFP leaders in *Canadian Dimension* and the joint production of the election pamphlet with the UFP comrades have been very positive initiatives toward beginning to develop this solidarity between anticapitalist activists in both nations.

NDP Electioneering in Ottawa

By Kevin Skerrett

s critical as we may be of the limitations of electoral politics, the shallow character of mainstream media coverage of elections, and the compromises made by social democratic parties and politicians, socialists tend to follow their content and results very closely because they still tell us a lot about where our political culture is — and maybe where it's going.

In Ottawa, two ridings attracted most of the attention of those on the Left. Ottawa Centre, a previous NDP seat, featured former leader Ed Broadbent challenging Liberal insider Richard Mahoney, a close associate and advisor to Paul Martin. The other riding of particular interest was Ottawa South, where Monia Mazigh — the wife of Maher Arar — ran a high-profile campaign for the NDP against David McGuinty, the brother of Premier Dalton. Both of these campaigns merit some comment.

When Ed Broadbent announced his candidacy last November, the mainstream media made much of a tossed-off comment he made about increasing social inequality and "class war". Unfortunately, his rhetorical flourishes ended there, and once nominated, his sloganeering changed. "I believe in a market economy, but not a market society," he repeated, never considering the possibility of any causal linkage from one to the other. Ed's social democracy is not unlike that of other "reformed" New Democrats, who variously embrace market economics — and capitalism itself — but insist that they

– and capitalism itself – but insist that they can be tamed and humanized through government regulation.

Much more surprising was the weakness of Broadbent's foreign policy commentary. On March 10th, the campaign's official launch was kicked off with a meeting that attracted several hundred supporters. His speech was notable for two things. First, he admitted to having supported the NATO war on Yugoslavia. Second, in the course of discussing the imminent threat of deeper integration with US foreign policy, he did not even acknowledge the fact that just 10 days previous the Canadian government had fallen into line in supporting the US-sponsored coup in Haiti, removing the elected President Aristide, and replacing him with an unelected pro-US puppet regime. For a party, and a leader, that had previously been among Canada's leading critics of NATO and US imperialism, it was a serious signal of the continuing slippage of NDP foreign policy.

Finally, Ed's position at the wrong end of the party spectrum was cemented in the middle of the campaign when he spoke critically of Jack Layton's principled opposition to the Clarity Act that is so despised by progressives – and most others – in Quebec. Following critical comments from Layton about this undemocratic legislation, a string of prominent New Democrats, including Premiers Doer and Calvert and former leadership candidate Bill Blaikie, broke ranks with the leader and challenged his position on the issue. Broadbent joined the pro-Clarity Act chorus, now clearly an entrenched group in the caucus that does not recognize the contradiction between the Party's purported respect for Quebec's self-determination and legislation that leaves decision-making about the winning threshold, and the formulation of the question itself, outside of Quebec.

In the end, Broadbent's positive reputation, profile and history allowed him to coast to a relatively easy victory, taking 41% of the vote, as compared to 31% for Mahoney, 19% for the Conservative, and 7.5% for the Greens.

In Ottawa South, there was no strong history for the NDP, with past elections bringing between 3% and 7% of the vote. When Monia Mazigh announced her candidacy, a ripple of interest swept through the region, particularly among feminists activists. It was recognized that

in Mazigh, the NDP had gained an articulate and high-profile woman of colour as a candidate, someone whose recent success in campaigning for the release of her husband, Maher Arar, had brought her – and the whole issue of human rights and the complicity of Canadian and US governments in torture – into the public spotlight.

Unfortunately, Monia's candidacy was not as straightforward as this. Before long, it became clear that while she was in a position to be particularly heartfelt about the racism and human rights abuses faced by immigrants, refugees, and Muslims in particular, her religious convictions meant that she would not be a champion for certain rights that most on the Left – and most in the NDP – take as a given. She admitted that if legislation were to come forward on the issue of same-sex marriage or abortion, she would abstain from a vote.

This failure to champion the equality rights of gays and lesbians and the reproductive rights of women is something that the NDP has faced in the past, as when the party's MPs have taken anti-choice positions attributed to Christian affiliations. But it is particularly disappointing given that we are living in a period when Muslim communities, in Canada, the US, and parts of Europe, have been facing an intensified post-9/11 backlash of racism, suspicion, and even imprisonment. Canada's anti-terrorism legislation and repressive Security Certificate mechanism for detention without due process or charge, have been used to target Muslims more than any other community. We on the Left, inside and outside the NDP, desperately need to build bridges with this community, overcome our own ignorance about Islam, and challenge our habitual hostility to religion in order to effectively defend those most targeted.

Fortunately, not all Muslim campaigners approached these issues the same way. Another Muslim NDP candidate, Itrath Sayed, running in Delta-Richmond East in BC, faced the same dilemma when she was attacked by other Muslims for defending equal rights to marriage. Apparently, she and her parents were "effectively ex-communicated" from her mosque in Richmond. She fought back, writing an open letter that forcefully defends the equality rights of all Canadians.

"My position is very clear. I support the principle that all human beings in Canada must be equal under Canadian law and have the same rights in Canada. Every single person."

"In the last few years since 9/11, the Muslim community has watched, and largely stood silent, while our civil rights have been attacked, while we have been targeted by CSIS, while we have been demonized in the media, while we have had our personal lives invaded, while many of us have been arrested or detained for questioning by police. Not to mention how one of us was kidnapped by the U.S. government with the cooperation of our own government and sent to a torture prison. There has been fear and silence in our community."

"Muslims in Canada must be clear that we can not demand our own equality in Canada, our own rights to be who we are, while also calling for the rights of others to be restricted. If the principle of equality under Canadian law is compromised, it will be compromised for all minority communities."

Despite these issues, and the fact that some progressives refused to support her campaign, Mazigh did very well in the election, nearly doubling the NDP's vote total to some 13.7%. She enlivened a campaign in an otherwise quite conservative riding, and attracted many young women of colour into electoral politics. She managed to do all of this operating in her third language – no mean feat – following an obviously grueling year. Hopefully, Monia Mazigh will stay involved in progressive politics, and further reflection will bring her to a point where she can view equality rights in the same way as Itrath Sayed. In any case, her candidacy and the ensuing debate was a reminder that activists and progressives still have work to do to figure out how we build movements and organizations that challenge anti-Muslim bigotry while at the same time challenging friends and comrades with religious convictions to reject the partitioning of the human rights agenda.

The Scottish Socialist Party: A Report on the 2004 Annual Conference

By Ernest Tate and Jess MacKenzie

The sixth annual conference of the Scottish Socialist Party – with about 500 delegates in attendance -- took place in the spring, in Edinburgh. For a small and relatively new organization, a little over five years old, the SSP has been very successful. It now has 3500 members, up over 500 since the last conference. The SSP is a “multi-tendency” party, comprised of most of the left groups in Scotland who organize themselves around their specific political viewpoints in the party to constitute themselves as “platforms.” During the conference, the “platforms” organized meetings in the evenings which were open to all delegates.

In this report, we will not cover all the discussions at the event but only touch on a few. The party is active in many campaigns such as anti-war and anti-racist work; two of its major activities are campaigns for free school meals and against the council tax.

The SSP is for “red-blooded socialism, rooted in the working class,” stated Catriona Grant, who chaired the first day’s sessions. The party calls for an independent socialist Scotland. It’s a combat socialist party, committed to the overturn of capitalism. Popular support has increased – in some industrial areas it is only a percentage point or so behind that of the official opposition, the Scottish National Party (SNP). In the recent Scottish elections, it elected five new members, four of whom are women, in addition to re-electing Tommy Sheridan, the national leader. Two SSP municipal councilors were also elected.

The Party has added to these successes inside the union movement with its “Make the Break” campaign, which it launched in 1999, a political struggle to challenge trade union financial support for Tony Blair’s New Labour. Richie Venton, the Party’s Industrial organizer told the delegates, “a rolling thunder of discontent is growing in the unions. We are no longer swimming against the stream, and the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union has added huge authority to our arguments.”

“At this stage”, Venton said, “among the mass of trade unionists, the predominant

trend is towards straight-forward disaffiliation from New Labour. They are more decisive and clear-cut than many of the more active core of the unions. This is especially prevalent in unions which have been in sharp conflict with the government, like the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). Whilst a hugely positive step forward, disaffiliation from Labour, if left in isolation, could leave the unions in political limbo; would probably often mean the tops of the union carry on unofficial collaboration with New Labour and could reinforce a certain anti-political party strain within trade union ranks – born of the vile experiences at the hand of New Labour.” Working class conditions continue to deteriorate in Scotland. Many delegates referred to new data which showed average longevity of the population in some areas has fallen to below 63 years, similar to Russia’s.

Venton cautioned against expecting mass over-night affiliation to the SSP. It’s not an immediate prospect, he said, “but that must in no way act as a recipe for passivity...we help shape the future, not just speculate.”

The RMT in Scotland have affiliated 8000 members to the SSP, an action that led Blair’s New Labour to expel the entire RMT. (This union is famous for being the first, over one hundred years ago, to move behind the Labour Party when it was founded.) In February, in defiance of their National leadership, 4000 postal workers in Edinburgh, Fife,

Central Scotland and the Borders affiliated, and later this year, the FBU, which was still battling to get a contract, will debate its affiliations. All these unions helped finance the SSP’s campaign in the European elections.

Tommy Sheridan opened the conference by paying tribute to the work of the party since the previous conference and warmly welcomed the new delegates from the RMT, and Communication Workers’ Union (CWU) and he urged SSP members in the Firefighter’s and public service unions to step up their drive to “make the break” with New Labour.

A special delegation of striking nursery-nurses (day-care workers) was given a rousing welcome, backed up by a financial collection from the delegates as the hat was passed around. In appreciation, the nursery workers, organized and staffed a crèche for the event. The SSP was active on the picket-lines around the country in support of the strike and its MSPs in parliament were extremely vocal in their criticisms of the Labour-Liberal Democrats government’s opposition to a fair settlement for the nursery-nurses.

On Saturday, Alan McCombes introduced the Party’s “Draft Manifesto for the European Elections.” This was a big issue before the delegates. There was lots of discussion on the floor and in the corridors about the implications of electing even one member in the proportional representation system and



who would be on the Party's slate. "The SSP rejects the Union Jack –flag-waving anti-Europeanism of the xenophobic right. Socialism has always been an international philosophy", states the draft manifesto. In today's world, "international socialism can no longer be derided as a utopian fantasy. The starry eyed dreamers of the 21st century are those who hide behind national walls and live in permanent quarantine from the rest of the world." Our aim, "is to build socialism from below – a socialism based on decentralization, diversity and voluntary cooperation between nations", pointing out that "there is nothing intrinsically internationalist about a United Europe or internationalist about the United Kingdom." The philosophy underlying the E.U. is right wing, the manifesto says. As it turned out, even though the party more than doubled its vote from the previous European elections, obtaining 5.2% of the votes cast, it failed to elect a member. The SSP, in contrast to the Scottish National Party (SNP), which is the official opposition in Scotland, is opposed to Britain adopting the euro as its currency. It says, "Scotland would effectively become an economic prisoner, held under house arrest by the bankers of Frankfurt." It "means submitting to yet another 'one-size-fits-all' monetary regime". The rise of the SSP has shaken the SNP. Many of its members have joined, or are in the process of joining, the SSP. The SNP is in a leadership crisis, partly as a result of its failures in the last election when it lost eight seats. Under pressure from the SSP, they recently abandoned their support for the Council tax, (a form of poll tax), an issue which is front and centre of the SSP's everyday activity. According to The Times of London, a recent report to the SNP's executive revealed membership has dropped two-thirds in the past year, to 6000, the lowest in a generation. At the convention, Tommy Sheridan welcomed a new group of four ex-SNP members into the party, one of whom came to the conference as an observer but left as an SSP member. Another was a member of the SNP's trade union group. Delegates voted a former SNP-MSP, onto the SSP's slate of candidates for the European elections. The SSP's position on independence was the subject of three motions placed before the delegates. The Party has been in

discussion over the past period with other pro-independence forces in Scotland about organizing an Independence Convention. The SNP and the Green Party have now signed on, Alan McCombes told the delegates, and the Convention will be launched later this year. The issue of Scottish independence was debated fully at the previous convention, at which time the party's position was overwhelmingly reaffirmed. But the matter was raised again. There was some resentment among some of the delegates to what they said was kind of guerilla war that does not offer anything new in the way of argument. This was expressed in a motion from the Scottish Republican Platform that called for the Party to incorporate its position on independence into the Party's constitution. "The SSP was founded as a pro-independence party. The democratic demand for Scottish independence is a 'triple pillar' of SSP policy," it said, pointing out that "for a small but vociferous minority of SSP activists, this remains a matter to be continually challenged..." The delegates rejected this constitutional change however, recognizing that it would be wrong to seek an organizational solution to the confusion on this important question. One group, the "Committee for a Workers' International", commonly known in Britain as the "Militant tendency", distributed an open letter from their London leadership to the conference, denouncing the Party's position on the national question, warning the delegates of a "shift towards opportunism" when the Scottish Socialist Voice, the Party's weekly paper, in the spirit of open and democratic discussion, allowed ex-SNP members to express their opinions -- mainly left criticisms of the SNP -- in its pages. Also, a motion influenced by the Socialist Workers' Party "platform" took a similar position on the national question. It supported "the right of Scottish people to self-determination", however, it believed the Party's position on independence "should be based on whether the goal of Independence and the means of achieving it, will strengthen or weaken the political, ideological and industrial position of the working class – not only in Scotland, but in the U.K. and internationally." This motion was defeated. A major issue in Scottish society is the question of religious anti-catholic sectarianism which finds its expression in

many forms, and which can be seen often, for example, in the eruption of violence and rioting by hooligans during soccer matches between the Rangers and Celtic teams. The delegates debated the difficult issues of building a secular educational system, and the issue of religious schools. The recent reactionary actions of the French government in banning Muslim women for the wearing of the head-scarves in schools, and the confusion in the French left on this issue, was mentioned several times in the discussion, which was at times impassioned, but open and comradely. A motion was finally adopted which stated: "religion is a private, not a state matter. The state shall not restrict an individual's right to freedom of conscience, of worship or of religious observance. The Church and state are totally separate entities. The state shall not fund or subsidize any religious institutions or organizations; the state shall not sponsor any act of religious worship or observance." We were impressed with the spirit of democracy around the event was, but it seemed to us, the pressure to keep to the agenda, meant there was insufficient time for reflection to allow people to change their minds. It was a conference for the branches, however, not just in words, but in actual practice. The SSP leaders, many of whom introduced the major reports, did not speak from the floor. The movers of motions were given time to introduce them, as were seconders. Amendments were also introduced and seconded. After debate, both the movers of the motion and the amendments were given time to sum up. And while this was going on, the delegates were voting by secret ballot to elect their leadership. There was no organizational wrangling. This was a sharp contrast to our experience in the labour movement in
(Continued on page 12)

Two Marches: Anti-War Organizing in Toronto

By Peter Graham

Anti-war groups competed for the support of protestors in the June 30th day of action against the supposed US hand over in Iraq. The June 30th Coalition (J30) and the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War (TCSW) organized different pickets and demonstrations throughout the day. For most of the day, the two groups were supportive of each other's events where hundreds of protestors came out to denounce the continuing US intervention in Iraq. But tensions developed as the day came to an end.

The all day action began with an information picket organized by J30 at the Canadian Commercial Corporation - a crown corporation established to facilitate the sale of Canadian military equipment. Afterwards was a demo held by Stir It Up, a youth coalition, at the intersection south of Queen's Park. Then it was off to the US Consulate, where TCSW held a rally.

A Choice

After listening to a number of speakers, the protestors had to choose between two marches. J30 had planned a march towards the financial district, while TCSW, had received a permit to march a circuitous route north of the consulate. As TCSW called for unity in the anti-war movement, J30 supporters chanted "Go south," as they distributed a leaflet calling on Canadian institutions, public and corporate, to be the focus of the anti-war movement. The 600 demonstrators appeared to be evenly split in their choice of a marching route.

Predictably, there was some friction generated between the two camps. Some J30 activists said they were under the impression that TCSW had not planned a march. There were allegations that a march had been added only when TCSW had learned about J30's march. TCSW supporters maintained that a march had been planned all along. All of TCSW's past demonstrations at the consulate in-

cluded marches, when numbers permitted. There was a disquieting tussle for TCSW's microphone.

Beyond the day's petty intrigues, the split in the demonstration highlights the different politics in the anti-war movement.

The June 30th Coalition

In a pattern similar to the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty's Oct 16th march on Bay Street in 2001 (OCAP is a sponsor of J30), the southbound demonstrators weaved along the streets and thoroughfares of the financial district to prevent police from stopping their unlicensed procession. At several points the crowd stopped at towers sheltering businesses benefiting from the occupation of Iraq, listening to speakers give the details on each corporation's involvement. There were repeated calls of "Bay Street's covered in Baghdad's blood," renditions of "Workers' revolution is what we're for" and "Smash the state." - chants never heard on TCSW's marches. J30 tends to link their opposition to the war with an overtly anti-capitalist agenda. They look to the tactics of the anti-globalization movement, noting that they "have come together to fight capitalist globalization before." They believe that a diversity of tactics needs to be em-

ployed to end the occupation with direct action playing a central role.

Recent attempts at direct action had not been successful. For the March 20th J30's march winds through the financial district

demonstration in Ottawa, there was a split-off from the march, but they were



forced to regroup back into the main march. Some attempts at direct action marches were rendered invisible by the sheer size of the permit-clad demonstrations. This time, attempts at direct action seemed to be a success because instead of being relegated to the sidelines, direct action protestors played a significant part in the marches.

Toronto Coalition to Stop the War

The Toronto Coalition to Stop the War



(TCSW) has been responsible for much of the anti-war activity in Toronto. The 100,000-strong anti-war demonstration of last year was held under their auspices. More recently, at least 5,000 people assembled to protest on March 20th, the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. TCSW is not a single-issue coalition. They have joined opposition to the occupation of Iraq with resistance to the occupations of Afghanistan and Palestine. Speakers at TCSW events have condemned the blockade of Cuba and endorsed NDP politicians. While there are socialists playing an important part in TCSW, they publicly take a back seat to unions, religious organizations and other important constituent parts of the coalition.



TCSW marchers listen to the day's final speaker

The TCSW plan is to forge the broadest coalition possible against the war. This includes obtaining the appropriate permits for legal assembly and employing marshals to maintain an orderly demonstration.

When opposition to the war was flowing, it was easy to see the effectiveness of this approach: TCSW posters were hanging in workplaces throughout the city; crowds of union member attended the demonstrations; the Arab community was out in strength. The broad constituency TCSW sought turned out in large numbers.

Frustration

When there's ebb in activity, the choice become less clear. There is frustration with the pace of events. Despite strong protests around the world, the war went ahead and the occupation continues. The mass media, which actually promoted some of the anti-war events in advance last year, is silent. The liberal left, while anti-war, have not rallied against the occupation. Many socialists, while calling for an end to the oc-

cupation, seem unsure as to how this should be accomplished.

For the committed numbers who repeatedly attend anti-war demonstrations, the rituals of sloganeering and marching seem more burdensome. Changing the routine, by marching on their own route, with their slogans, added a level of energy that had been absent in recent demonstrations.

Which side are you on?

Although the anti-capitalist rhetoric of J30 are closer to where we, as socialists, are at, most of the working class people we want to attract are not there yet. Furthermore, direct action demonstrations are largely big city fare. They do little to decrease the gapping hole between the Toronto left and those living in other parts of the province.

The anti-war movement of the 60's and 70's, as with the Latin American peace movement of the 1980's, had many ups and downs. So it is with this anti-occupation movement. The Vietnam anti-war movement was in its' infancy when riffs emerged in broader coalitions. There were criticisms of events not being radical enough. Some activists urged a turn to community work. Others wanted to "escalate the costs of war."

Socialist were on both sides of the tactical fence. Of the major theoretical currents of the day, the Communist Party and a majority of Trotskyists hewed towards the all-inclusive model. The most popular socialist current of that time, Maoism, largely favoured a direct actionist approach. There was a mutual anger at what each camp viewed as a betrayal.

This time, the anger may be muted. Socialists who are cool to a diversity of tactics are in a bit of a bind. While direct action, as seen in the anti-globalization movement, was once condemned as adventurism – and may be again – it is difficult for these tactics to be condemned per se, as most socialists hopped on the anti-globalization bandwagon, tactics and all. That there should be competing, though incomplete, visions of resistance is inevitable. Socialists must try to limit the tension between different approaches to organizing. Might the anti-occupation movement create green and red marches, as used in many anti-globalization demonstrations?

SSP's 2004 Conference
-continued from page 10

Canada. We've participated in many union and NDP meetings over the years and often – quite often -- even after having spoken from the platform, we've seen leaders eat up the delegate's time at the floor mikes. Rank and file delegates have been pushed aside so an MP can speak. In addition the agenda is always taken up with videos and special events and special invited speakers, the mayor or some provincial leaders, who use up a lot of time of the convention with the willing cooperation of the organizers, who say they are making the event "entertaining". There was none of that there. It was also interesting to see the role played by the newly affiliated union delegates. We had expected to see them sitting on the sidelines, watching, voyeur like, as the various "platforms" engaged in debate. We've seen that happen in some meetings in Canada. But no, these workers seemed very experienced politically and were fully engaged in what was going on, many of them making passionate interventions, frequently effecting policy in a serious way, probably the result of their long struggle in the unions. This was clearly their Party.

The Scottish Socialist Party was born in the last decade of the last century when many ideologues of the ruling classes said the struggle for socialism had come to an end. We are still early in the new century and the SSP gives us a glimpse of how it is possible for socialists in an advanced capitalist country to organize themselves in a new and democratic way. We have heard there are similar formations developing in other countries, and this is truly inspiring. Of course, it would be absurd to think we can mechanically reproduce in Canada what the Scottish socialists have achieved, but we can certainly learn a lot from their experience. It might be a good idea if, in the spirit of internationalism, more people visited Scotland to see the SSP. Perhaps some Canadian socialists can look to attending their next conference.

Yousuf Karsh
 Industrial Portraits featuring Ford of Canada, Windsor, 1951
 To August 29th, 2004
 Art Gallery of Windsor
 Windsor, Ontario

Reviewed by Chris Roberts



Yousuf Karsh (1908-2002) is Canada's best-known photographic artist. Born to Armenian parents in eastern Turkey, Karsh fled Ottoman persecution, first to Syria in 1922 and then to Canada in 1925. Karsh's father (a successful merchant) was devoutly Roman Catholic, and his educated mother Protestant; his parents originally destined him for the priesthood. Karsh became fascinated by photography, however, and after apprenticing in Boston, he returned to Canada in 1931 aspiring to photograph the illustrious figures of his era.

The Art Gallery of Windsor's exhibit of Karsh's portraits is especially interesting, since his fame and life-work centred not around working-class subjects, but what Karsh referred to as 'people of consequence'. Karsh's passion was capturing the animating force inhabiting the souls of statesmen, eminent thinkers and religious figures, a force he termed 'the inward power'. Karsh's spiritual quest and photographic technique strived to render this quality of 'greatness', those exalted aspects of mind and soul and spirit revealed on the faces of his distinguished subjects. Karsh wasn't exclusively fixated on the great, however. In early 1951, he accepted a Ford of Canada commission to photograph Windsor workers for use in Ford's annual reports and company advertising. The two weeks he spent

photographing Ford workers came amidst a similar photographic assignment at the Atlas Steel facilities in Welland, Ontario and Sharon Steel Limited in Pennsylvania.

The photographs romantically depict workers in shimmering light and beautifully-lit workplaces, Karsh's careful technique giving his figures a luminous and heroic quality. The exhibit is perhaps most interesting, however, for the context for Karsh's images. Between May 1950 and December 1951, historian David Fraser describes "an on-again off-again in-plant war" at Ford's, peaking in the discharge of 26 workers (including 13 stewards and committeemen) and a wildcat shutdown. In the years following the 1945 strike, management had adopted a conciliatory approach to the union, but the intensification of competition in the late 1940s prompted management to tighten discipline and restore management's shopfloor authority. At the same time, in-plant union reps became more determined to circumvent the grievance procedure and confront shopfloor problems head-on. In the early summer of 1950, a number of workplace actions and stoppages resulted in discharges.

That fall, Local 200 members rejected Ford management's pressure for a five-year agreement, against the wishes of their local and regional leadership. Ongoing agitation during the subsequent wage negotiations

led to accusations of sabotage from management, and a speed-up campaign conducted by management in July 1951 renewed months of confrontation, culminating in wildcats and discharge of 26 workers in December. In October 1951, Ford announced that assembly would be moved from Windsor to Oakville, where "the climate of capital" was healthier.

Given the turmoil, it's fascinating to see Karsh's beaming workers accompanied by confident descriptions of employee loyalty and spreading affluence. Karsh's gaze was directed skyward, his attention undivided by the earthly realities before him, and this political and aesthetic vision, guided by Karsh's spirituality, is on full view at this exhibit. In his 1962 memoirs *In Search of Greatness*, Karsh recounts an old Armenian story in which a master shows his slave his image in a mirror, which the slave has never seen before. Said the master to his slave, "Look into this mirror, and you will see yourself as you are." The slave did so; then broke into tears and sobbed. "What is wrong?" said the master. Replied the slave, "I never knew how ugly I was." His master consoled him, "You have seen yourself but once. I have been looking at you for years and I am not crying. In your face I have always seen the love and devotion which I treasure beyond price. It is beauty to me: go and be at peace."



democrats, the shortsighted objective of only seeking profits for shareholders makes the case for converting corporations into ‘stakeholding’ institutions, by adding new agendas to corporate governance while leaving the basic organizational structure and market intact (partly in the way of the Sarbanes-Oxley legislation in the U.S. and the Broadbent corporate accountability commission in Canada). This is a role played large by Ray Anderson, CEO of Interface, a billion dollar commercial carpet maker in Atlanta, as the ‘good capitalist’ follower of Paul Hawken’s *Ecology of Commerce*, who confesses that corporations have the habit of ‘making other people pay the bills’ for their wasteful and toxic practices, and implores other companies to lessen their ecological footprint.

But all the evidence in the film on the ‘pathological pursuit of profits and power’ – the metaphor adopted to explain corporate behaviour – points to far less sanguine and easy conclusions. The 19th century creation of the legal fiction of treating the corporation as a ‘person’, via the granting of a corporate charter in order to limit the liability of shareholders, has created a social monster. This is where all the power of film as a media is called upon to make unexpected links in time and space to convey the structural power of corporations. A flurry of clips of newscasts, interviews, old black and white newsreels, and video shoots juxtapose corporate public relations imagery against evidence of corporate malfeasance, environmental damage, abuses of child labour, news manipulation and hostility to democracy. Little is new here. But the staccato repetition of corporate vice – presented with a mix of awe, shock, humour, and sober analysis by the sages of the anti-corporate movement such as Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, Vandana Shiva – staggers. The linkages drawn between vastly different historical periods and countries, from IBM collaboration with the Nazis to Enron corporate fraud to Gap sweatshops in Honduras, dispels all illusions that the problem is simply a ‘few bad apples’.

The assessment of the impact of corporate rule on democracy draws the film to a conclusion. And here, it must be said, the film (as well as Bakan’s book)

The Corporation
145 minutes, 2003
Big Picture Media

Producers: Mark Achbar
Bart Simpson
Directors: Jennifer Abbott
Mark Achbar
Writer: Joel Bakan

Reviewed by Greg Albo



Nothing illustrates the exhaustion of the North American public from the ‘reality’ produced by the mass media than the box office smashes of a series of ‘guerrilla’ documentaries (for they are anything but conventional narratives) over the last year or so. Rather than escaping into yet another pubescent comedy, postmodern action thriller, or romanticized historical drama, audiences have headed for *Super Size Me*, *The Control Room*, Michael Moore’s *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and *Fog of War*. The most distinctly radical of these has been *The Corporation*, directed and written by Canadians Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott and Joel Bakan. Not only has this literally titled film done record box office during its run in Canada, it has been packing houses in the U.S. as well since its early summer release. Not exactly countries that would be expected to be trumping anti-corporate cinema.


The contention of the film, as well as the companion book by Joel Bakan, *The Corporation* (New York: Free Press, 2004), is straightforward enough. The

corporation stands as the most powerful institution of our time, yet is accountable only to itself and the singular objective of making profits for its shareholders. Other societal objectives, such as ecological sustainability, decent work and pay, public health, common space, are all damned by the inherent nature of corporations, even if they occasionally receive passing notice. For neoliberals, given voice in the film by arch ideologues Milton Friedman of the University of Chicago and Michael Walker of the Fraser Institute in Vancouver, and CEOs of Goodyear and Shell, this is the merit of the market and capitalist competition. Friedman’s comments are utterly chilling in his abrupt dismissal of any goal other than making profits at all costs; Walker comes off in good part as the intellectual huckster he is in defending low wage zones and child labour as necessary exploitation on the inevitable path to prosperity via free markets; and the corporate CEOs gush all the empty sincerity about their societal roles that MBAs have been taught to recite on business ethics. For liberals and social


dodges the central question its pathology metaphor poses: are corporations behaving badly because the imperatives of the capitalist economic system requires them to, or because they lack the appropriate external regulatory context to overcome these disorders? The answer is confused. Because corporations are such powerful institutions, the film only poses their political opposition in the chaos of street protests insistent that ‘the world is not for sale’. Alternative directions lie in the need to improve corporate accountability, the boycott of ‘branding’ through shifts in consumptive practices, insistence on the

old state insulation of certain basic services such as access to water outside the market, and ‘internalization’ of the actual ecological costs of production. The workers that produce the value and wealth that corporate private property rights allow to be appropriated by the shareholding class of owners are only present in the film as the exploited (and then making their appearance largely as the marginalized in developing countries) and not as potential social actors. After all the stunning imaginative film-making in rendering a searing indictment of corporate power, The Corporation dissolves into the banal of

better regulation, better ethics, less bias in international institutions. The corporation, it seems, is too powerful to do away with. The hard political question begs asking: is this the anti-corporate movement faltering, or the corporate movement for neoliberal globalization succeeding?



Visit www.socialistproject.ca for upcoming Socialist Project events in Toronto. Our founding statement and constitution are available on the website. For further information about Socialist project, or to find out if there's a branch in your area, email socialistproject@hotmail.com





slowly diminishing figures, but one that should receive more attention. Given the size and power of the American cultural industry, and the saturation of the Canadian landscape with American products, Canadians should take the ideal of ‘cultural’ sovereignty more seriously. As an artists and activist, I often wonder what it must feel like to be an American fighting for public health care against the array of large corporate interests and rightwing free-market perspectives. In a way, being a Canadian and arguing for a sovereign culture is not dissimilar. Political folks of all stripes, for many years, have paid lip service to the need for a sovereign Canadian cultural industry and identity. But in the current era of neo-liberalism, Canadian ‘culture’ seldom appears on the political agenda as an agent of sovereignty; culture has been reduced to commodified ‘entertainment’ that is produced for and consumed in an increasingly international marketplace. Though Canadian culture is a commercialized and commodified as a product of the fourth largest industry in Canada (a lot of it is sub-contract work by Americanized firms), the ideal of a distinct Canadian culture still helps Canadians to distinguish themselves and their identities from the culture of American empire.

The Toronto Media-Festivals Network, the creation of a progressive bookseller and an arts facilitator, organized a discussion between the current crop of federal political hopefuls and a panel of media (mainly film industry) production agents. A noticeable, but unfortunately predictable absence, was a representative from the Regressive Conservatives. Even the Greens sent someone who was truly ‘green’. The Liberals had a heavy hitter with Sarmite Butte, who worked with

Sheila Copps at the Department of Heritage. She drowned all the others with an insiders’ knowledge of cultural policy and never admitted a flaw. Peter Tabuns of the NDP had his heart in the right place, but didn’t know the territory. The main topic brought up by the media panelists was the dramatic drop in Canadian film production and distribution: only 3.8% of Canadian film box office gross goes to Canadian productions! Unfortunately, this has been the case for quite some time. It’s the same story with

Rethinking the Labour Movement

Labour Committee of the Socialist Project

The Labour Committee of the Socialist Project is launching a process to involve workplace activists in the rethinking and rebuilding of the labour movement. The urgency of this undertaking lies in what we see as a historic crisis in the labour movement (a crisis that exists in labour movements virtually everywhere, not just Canada).

Over the past quarter century, capitalism has dramatically changed; unions have not. In spite of sporadic and impressive struggles, there is little evidence that the trade union movement has any overall orientation or effective strategy for coping with the changes. Moreover, given its defensive mode, the labour movement has been reluctant to even acknowledge how serious this internal crisis is. We do not pretend to have a set of ready-made answers. What we can, however, contribute is organizing a process and some structures for activists to come together and begin the kind of discussions that might develop promising answers.

What's the proposal?

The Labour Committee will be establishing networks of activism based in workplaces and communities, with each network focusing on the issues in either a particular sector (e.g. auto, telecommunications, the municipal sector) or on a set of issues that cross sectors (e.g. the inter-relationship of speed-up, health and safety, and workers' comp struggles; democratizing social services; living wage campaign). In the late fall, we plan to organize a conference that will a) discuss the overall crisis within the movement; b) get reports from representatives of these networks and engage in general discussions about their reports; and c) establish new networks where there is interest in doing so. (We will also invite other workplace and community activists who have already been involved in such networking – e.g. in the health care sector – to share their experiences and lessons).

Why focus on such 'networks'?

We think such an approach addresses two crucial problems: labour's fragmentation into competing unions and the limits of struggles centered on traditional bargaining. The networks structure opens

the door to coming together across unions and also involving workers that are not in unions. It also supports raising the struggle to a more effective, more 'politicized' level by bringing in the larger issues of property rights and class capacities. Some examples might clarify what we mean by 'politicization'.

i) The recent bargaining in Air Canada suffered from unions fighting separately over how much they should give up, with no guarantee in the end that the corporation will not come back for more or that their jobs will remain. 'Politicizing' that struggle would have meant focusing on changing the conditions under which bargaining takes place and away from the false solution of concessions – that is, getting all the unions involved to launch a public campaign to restore Air Canada to public ownership and regulate the industry so as to get rid of the waste and turmoil of excess competition.

ii) Unions are structured to deal with the price and conditions of their labour but not with creating and protecting the jobs themselves against outsourcing, closures and privatization. That weakness affects all dimensions of our ability to defend workers including the restructuring of the work that remains. 'Politicizing' our struggle means broadening it so it can address the larger issue of economic restructuring

iii) Public sector workers facing cutbacks understandably tend to defend 'bigger government'. But this has proven to be an ineffective way to mobilize against cutbacks; too many people are alienated from government services that are bureaucratized, hierarchical, and which see their clients as problems to be managed. Perhaps the way to improve each of job security, the quality of the jobs involved, and the satisfaction in the services provided requires a radical challenge to the existing business model of government work – advancing one in which government workers have more input into the nature of the service being provided, and in which government workers actively mobilize their constituency to improve the service and resources provided.

iv) As long as we think of organizing as

competition between unions to bring in members that can protect their own financial base, organizing will be limited. But if we view it as part of building the capacities of the working class and a collective responsibility of the labour movement, then it becomes possible to imagine organizing getting the kind of priority, commitment of resources, and above all cooperation across unions, that can finally make key breakthroughs.

Is this a Toronto project or a national project?

We would clearly like to see this become a national project. We're presently discussing it with contacts in Winnipeg and Vancouver as well as Ontario (Toronto, Windsor, London, and Ottawa). For now, however, the focus will be Ontario - and even here, practical realities imply starting in various communities and then building to provincial networks,

Do you have to join the Socialist Project to participate in this?

Of course not. Anyone concerned with the labour movement's revival and seeing potential in this project is welcome. The Socialist Project will help to get the networks going and will organize the late fall conference to review and expand the networks. As the work proceeds and particular networks are ready to draft pamphlets that can be used to bring more people into the process, we'll help with the writing, lay-out and production of the material. Once underway, we hope to organize regular monthly meetings of representatives from the networks to discuss their work and other local issues. And we hope to use our new newsletter as a communication tool within and across the networks.

Since we believe that one of the reasons for the weakness of the labour movement has been our own weakness as socialists, we're committed to building a socialist left with a base in the union movement. We therefore hope that over time some of the network activists will also choose to join the Socialist Project.

How does someone get involved in the networks?

If you're interested, drop a note to socialistproject@hotmail.com. The note should include what you currently do and what kind of network you might be interested in. We will quickly get back to you.

Interview with Tariq Ali

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false boom, a boom which was largely fuelled by foreign investment, foreign moneys coming into banks where there were low interest rates. So people used to use this to invest, but whenever the investments got risky they used to take them out—international capital. They had absolutely no motivation for building Brazil or Argentina so you gradually began to have the rise of a new social movement which arose from below: peasant movements, landless peasant movements, unemployed working class movements which began to challenge this initially on a micro-level, in villages, in one town, in one locality, in one region. And then gradually it began to spread.

The result was continent wide protests...

You had an uprising in Cochabamba in Bolivia against the privatization of water. You had a struggle of the peasants of Cuzco in Peru, against the privatization of electricity. On both struggles the government made repression first and then they had to retreat. Then you had an unbelievable collapse in Argentina, where within three weeks I think 4 or 5 presidents came and fell. That began to demonstrate very graphically the crisis of neoliberal capitalism. Then you had Brazil. In Brazil you had a situation where Cardoso had de-industrialized the country completely. There was no national bourgeoisie left, there were no national traditions within the capitalist sphere left, and the country began to suffer.

Do you see the US Empire absorbing this energy by trying to propose a softer version of neoliberalism?

I don't think they are, at the moment, prepared to do that. They will only do that if they feel threatened. And they don't feel threatened at the moment. And one reason—I have to be very blunt here—they don't feel threatened is because there is an idealistic slogan within the social movements, which goes like this: 'We can change the world without taking power.' This slogan doesn't threaten anyone; it's a moral slogan. The Zapatistas—who I admire—you know, when they marched from Chiapas to Mexico City, what did they think was

going to happen? Nothing happened. It was a moral symbol, it was not even a moral victory because nothing happened. So I think that phase was understandable in Latin American politics, people were very burnt by recent experiences: the defeat of the Sandinistas, the defeat of the armed struggle movements, the victory of the military, etc., so people were nervous. But I think, from that point of view, the Venezuelan example is the most interesting one. It says: 'in order to change the world you have to take power, and you have to begin to implement change—in small doses if necessary—but you have to do it. Without it nothing will change.' So, it's an interesting situation and I think at *Porto Alegre* next year all these things will be debated and discussed—I hope.



Without adequately addressing state power, what alternative to neoliberalism is the Global Social Justice movement offering?

No, they have no alternative! They think that it is an advantage not to have an alternative. But, in my view that's a sign of political bankruptcy. If you have no alternative, what do you say to the people you mobilize? The MST[1] in Brazil has an alternative, they say 'take the land and give it to the poor peasants, let them work it.' But the Holloway[2] thesis of the Zapatistas, it's—if you like—a virtual thesis, it's a thesis for cyber space: let's imagine. But we live in the real world, and

in the real world this thesis isn't going to work. Therefore, the model for me of the MST in Brazil is much much more interesting than the model of the Zapatistas in Chiapas. Much more interesting.

What do you make of the impasse that has been reached between the grassroots and the government in Brazil?

I think the problem in Brazil is the following: the PT[3] captured the aspirations of the people, especially the poor. They captured them, but they couldn't deliver anything—so far, they have delivered nothing. In fact, the repression against the MST in the first year of Lula has been much higher than in any single year of the Cardoso government. The farmers and the police have victimized

and killed far more MST militants. Now, this will end badly. Why has it happened? It's happened because, in my opinion, the PT had not prepared itself in a serious way to even think about any real alternatives. Publicly they said, 'yes we'll give land to the landless, yes we will do this, yes we will do that,' but they had not made any real preparation. And Lula, I'm afraid, is a weak leader. A weak leader who is so excited at being in power, that he forgets why he is. The same thing

happened to Lech Walesa in Poland when the big mass movement *Solidarnosc* threw him up and he finally was elected. What did he deliver? Nothing. And he was voted out by the people, and that will happen to Lula.

Rebuilding the Brazilian left...

I think that, in my opinion, what we need in Brazil is a movement to refound the Brazilian left. And this movement must include, broadly speaking, those people inside the PT including many members of parliament and senators and grassroots members, a very key component that should include the MST and it should include that layer of Brazilian socialist intellectuals who are now very disillusioned. These three components are very important to refound the Brazilian left, it's foolish to do it by just a few people walking out and declaring 'we're a new party.' You need a new different sort of a movement and a different sort of a party than the PT. In these conditions the bulk of the Brazilian working class is now an informal working class—it's not the case as it was when the PT was founded. And so you have different priorities. You have to refound a Brazilian left which is in accord with these new priorities and realities of Brazil today, not some mythological picture of the past.

Before the elections in Brazil, I was in *Ribeirao Preto* at a festival, and they asked me 'if you were a Brazilian, who would you vote for?' And I said I would vote for Lula with the majority of the poor of Brazil. But I said my big worry was that Lula will forget who has voted him into power and he will cater to the policies of those who did not vote for him—the IMF and the World Bank and the international financial institutions. They did not vote for Lula, but they're the people who's policies are being carried out. And I said that would be a tragedy, and people gasped but that's exactly what's happened. And for me the relation between Lula and Cardoso is the relation between Thatcher and Blair. Blair followed Thatcher, Lula is following Cardoso. It's intertwined, and this is the tragedy of Brazil and in four or five years time there will massive disillusionment; the right will probably win again and we will have to start the fight from the beginning.

In Colombia, for example, there has been a huge militarization that is very similar to

cold war U.S strategy in Latin America. Where does this fit in with a new strategy that, as you have pointed out, is largely economic?

Colombia is exceptional at the moment, and of course Venezuela where they tried to push through a new coup d'état which failed. They will do that if nothing else succeeds. Where they feel democracy doesn't serve their interests they will return to the military—that's obvious. But at the moment the problem is: how to devise a society in which you can push through projects, social-democratic projects for the poor. That's the key in my opinion, that's why Venezuela is very important. Before Lula was elected a possibility emerged, an image emerged of the following: Argentina had collapsed, in Venezuela there was



Chávez that if you had a Bolivarian federation, of Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba, together you could produce a completely different way of looking at the world and a different form of society, which would not be repressive, which would not be vicious, which would transform the everyday lives of the poor. That has not happened because...Kirchner, in my opinion, is better than Lula; he's trying to resist on some levels. The big disappointment has been the Brazilian PT, big disappointment. But that doesn't mean we stop thinking like that because in a small way it's what I said at the press conference today: 10,000 Cuban doctors, thousands of poor Venezuelan kids going to Cuba to learn to be doctors. Here you take advantage of each other's strengths,

not each other's weaknesses. So it's very good that Venezuela and Chávez are taking advantage of the strengths of Cuba, rather than their weaknesses. The social structure they have created, health, education that's something that Brazil could do as well, but they don't do it.

In the wake of strong opposition to the Free Trade Area of the Americas, might the US use bilateral trade agreements to achieve its economic goals in Latin America?

I think the United States, you have to understand, always acts in its own interests, and its own interests are to stop a regional force from emerging in Latin America without the presence of the United States; to stop a regional force emerging in the far

east—China, Japan, Korea, without the presence of the United States; to stop Europe from becoming a strong political economic power. So, the United States will permit concessions where it suits their interests, as long as they feel that this doesn't threaten them politically or economically. They can make many concessions, but by and large they prefer bilateral deals. 'Deal with us. Don't deal with us

as a collective, deal with us one-to-one. That's what suits us.' That's always been their policy.

The Global Justice Movement is wary of Chávez' populism, his military background, and what they fear may become a top-down 'revolution' that excludes the grassroots. How do you think the GJM and Chávez can be reconciled?

As long as the poor in Venezuela support this government it will survive, when they withdraw their support it will fall. But I think it will be useful if the Global Justice movement—and there are many different strands in it—came and saw what's going on here. What's the problem? Go into the shantytowns, see what the lives of the

people are, see what their lives were before this regime came into power. And don't go on the basis of stereotypes. You cannot change the world without taking power, that is the example of Venezuela. Chávez is improving the lives of ordinary people, and that's why it's difficult to topple him—otherwise he would be toppled. So it's something that people in the Global Justice movement have to understand, this is serious politics. It's pointless just chanting slogans, because for the ordinary people on whose behalf you claim to be fighting getting an education, free medicine, cheap food is much much more important than all the slogans put together.

What do you think of the Venezuelan example of participatory democracy?

I think it needs to be strengthened. I think it's weak, I think the movement here needs to institutionalize on every level—the level of small *pueblos*, the level of the towns, the level of different quarters—organizations, which can be very broad: Bolivarian Circles, whatever you want to call them, which meet regularly, which talk with each other, which discuss their problems, which aren't simply a response to calls from above. It's very very important, because you know, Chávez is an unusual guy in Latin America—very special—and he is young and long may he live, but he has to create institutions which outlast him for the future of this country.

What is at stake in Venezuela? Whose interests? And can Venezuela survive alone? What does Venezuela mean to the US?

Venezuela is an example which the Americans wish to wipe out. Because if this example exists, and gets stronger and stronger and stronger, then people in Brazil, in Argentina, in Ecuador, in Chile, in Bolivia will say 'if Venezuelans can do it, we can do it.' So Venezuela, from that point of view, is a very important example. That's why they're so worked up. That's why the Americans pour in millions of dollars to help this stupid opposition in this country; an opposition which is incapable of offering any real alternative to the people, except what used to exist before: a corrupt, a servile oligarchy. That's what Venezuela means, and I think that one weakness, till recently, of the Bolivarian revolution has been that it has not done more towards the rest of Latin America, because it's been

under siege at home. But I think, once Chávez wins the referendum, and then the local elections I hope, and the mayoralty of Caracas in September, I hope then a big offensive is made for the rest of Latin America too. From that point of view, the model of the Cuban doctors is a very good one. I mean, a Venezuelan doctor—in five years Venezuelans will come back [from Cuba] as doctors, they can help both their own country, and they can go to other countries to work in the shantytowns. They are small things, but in the world in which we live they are very big things. Fifty years ago they would have been small, today they are very big. And that's why we have to preserve and nurture them.

The mainstream private media plays an important political role in Venezuela. How can this disinformation be combated?

What we lack in Latin America is means of communication, we need a satellite channel like *Al Jazeera*, and I said we'll call it '*Al Bolivar*' if you want. But you need one which reports regularly—what the right is saying, what the left movements are saying, which gives an account of what it is the MST wants, which challenges Lula, but which does it quite independently, without being attached to any state. And I think this satellite channel could be very important for the whole of Latin America, to challenge the BBC World, and CNN and have a Latin American channel. And the Venezuelans, and the Argentineans, etc. it's in their own interests to do it.

What do you think opposition and US strategy will be in the event of a Chávez victory come A-15?

Well, I think the only strategy left then is to try and overthrow him by a military coup. So the fact that the military seems to be supporting him, and after the previous coup it was a warning to him as well: you can't simply rely on the military without educating people. I think without the military in Venezuela, they can't do anything—they cannot topple him. I think the opposition, quite honestly, if they lose this referendum—which was their big demand for years, 'oh, he's not allowing a referendum,' forgetting that he has given you a constitution according which you want this referendum, without this constitution you couldn't have had this referendum—so if he wins this referendum the opposition will be fractured, I think they

will be completely demoralized, it's foolish.

Do you think opposition strategy might be to claim there was fraud in order to deligitimize Chavez's victory?

Well, look: we have to fight that when it happens, but I think this is why the process should be transparent, and I think lots of observers will be coming. And if that happens, the government has to go immediately on the offensive, and say 'this was a clear victory, you want you go into the whole country and talk to every single voter.' One hasn't got to be defensive about that. Go completely on the offensive and say, 'this isn't Florida.'

In any case, one shouldn't worry permanently, be paranoid, you know one should depend on the strength of the people. If the people vote him in, and he wins the referendum they will be big celebrations all over the country. And it will be obvious, what has happened.

This interview first appeared on Venezuelanalysis.com.

[1] *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*—Landless Rural Workers Movement, Brazil.

[2] John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*, Pluto Press: 2002.

[3] *Partido dos Trabalhadores*—Workers Party, Brazil.





February 15, 2003 - Sao Paulo, Brazil

Anti-Imperialism Against Empire

A new radicalization has emerged: initially around anti-globalization issues, and now with the anti-war and anti-imperialist movements. The limits of the American empire are being widely debated and politically contested around the world as well, of course, in Canada.

There is a particular urgency to provide arenas where a Marxist working-class politics can engage with the new radicalization, in all its diverse forms, and clarify the concepts and issues at hand. There are also debates within Marxism, and within other socialist currents, which are best explored in an open, democratic, politically-engaged environment.

A 'socialist school' in Marxian political economy – encompassing sessions on the basics, leading theoretical debates, and discussion of political strategy – could make a positive contribution to these debates and the reformation of a socialist Left.

The principle theme of this school, to be held on October 8 and 9 of 2004, would be 'Anti-Imperialism Against Empire'. We are seeking proposals for three types of presentations:

- a) panels on key strategic debates about contemporary imperialism and anti-imperialism;
- b) workshops introducing the ideas of Marxian political economy and the world market; and
- c) panels offering differing perspectives on contemporary anti-imperialist struggles and debates.



Possible themes:

- ☆ Latin America in revolt against neoliberalism?
- ☆ From Vietnam to Iraq: contours of American imperialism
- ☆ The Washington Consensus and the new economics of imperialism
 - ☆ Rosa Luxemburg and Nikolai Bukharin and the world economy
 - ☆ Contradictions of the American war economy
- ☆ Lenin's theory of imperialism: is it still relevant today?
- ☆ Do US workers benefit from US imperialism?
- ☆ Empire and war in the Middle East
 - ☆ US imperialism and East Asia
 - ☆ The culture of imperialism
 - ☆ Canada and US imperialism
- ☆ Strategy and tactics in the anti-war movement
- ☆ Anti-imperialism and the role of the working class
- ☆ Debating Hardt and Negri: In the shadow of empire or empires?
 - ☆ What is the new imperialism?
 - ☆ Race, class and anti-imperialism today

Send proposals by (July 31, 2004) to Scott Forsyth (sforsyth@yorku.ca), Greg Albo (albo@yorku.ca), or Paul Kellogg (paul.kellogg@utoronto.ca).

Key Debates, Contemporary Struggles ☆ Socialist School 2004