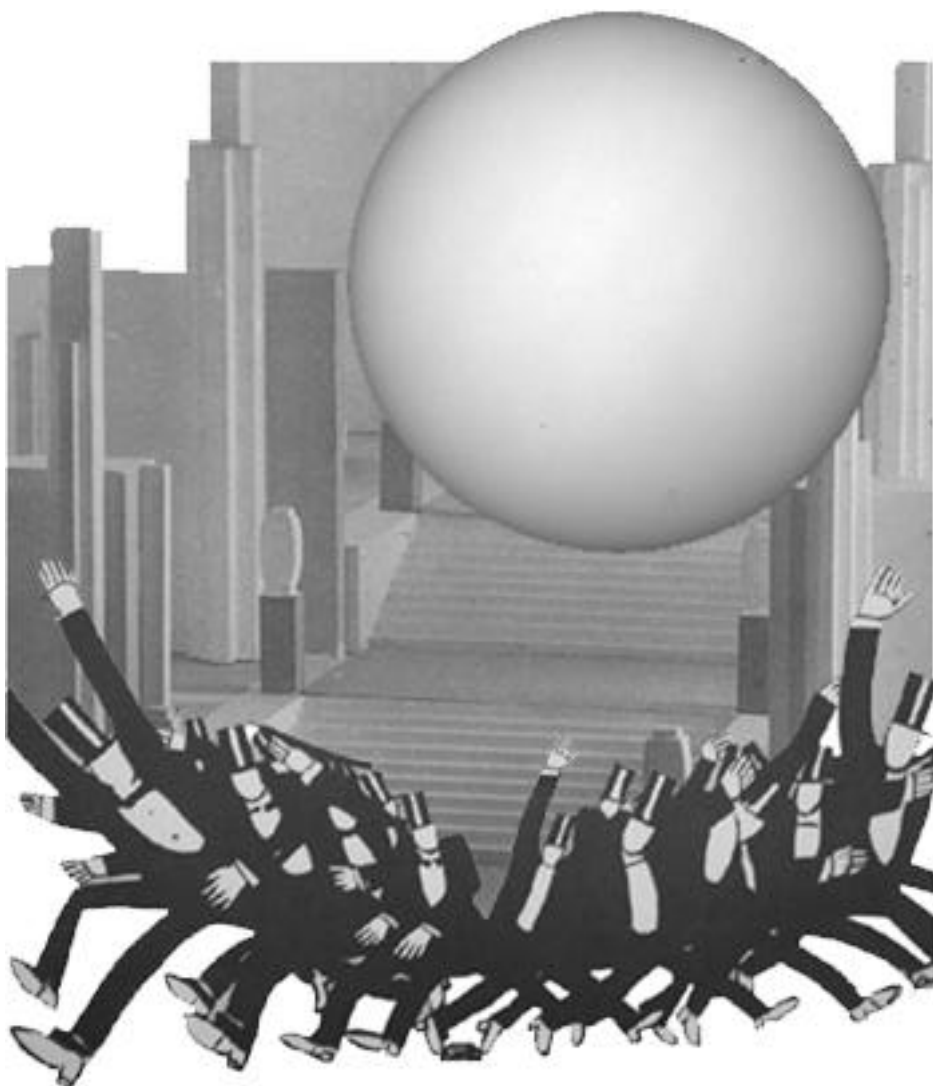


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RELAY

MARCH / APRIL 2005

A SOCIALIST PROJECT REVIEW



A NEW LEFT PARTY IN QUEBEC? * NHL LOCKOUT
SOCIAL FORUMS * ELECTIONS UNDER OCCUPATION
FIGHTING POVERTY WAGES * DAYS OF ACTION

\$2

RELAY

Relay, A Socialist Project Review, intends to act as a forum for conveying and debating current issues of importance to the Left in Ontario, Canada and from around the world.

March /
April

Contributions to the re-laying of the foundations for a viable socialist politics are welcomed by the editorial committee.

Issue #4

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About the Socialist Project

The Socialist Project does not propose an easy politics for defeating capitalism or claim a ready alternative to take its place. We oppose capitalism out of necessity and support the resistance of others out of solidarity. This resistance creates spaces of hope, and an activist hope is the first step to discovering a new socialist politics. Through the struggles of that politics – struggles informed by collective analysis and reflection – alternatives to capitalism will emerge. Such anti-capitalist struggles, we believe, must develop a viable working class politics, and be informed by democratic struggles against racial, sexist and homophobic oppressions, and in support of the national self-determination of the many peoples of the world. In Canada and the world today, there is an imperative for the Left to begin a sustained process of reflection, struggle and organizational re-groupment and experimentation. Neither capitalism nor neoliberalism will fade from the political landscape based on the momentum of their own contradictions and without the Left developing new political capacities. We encourage those who share this assessment to meet, debate and begin to make a contribution to a renewed socialist project in your union, school and community. For more information on the Socialist Project check our web-site at www.socialistproject.ca or e-mail us at socialistproject@hotmail.com.

Printed by:
Open Door Press
Winnipeg



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ELECTIONS UNDER OCCUPATION:

THE FALSE PROMISE OF DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Middle East Socialists Network of Canada

The recent elections in Afghanistan and Palestine as well as the January 31st elections in Iraq have brought illusory hopes for democracy and democratization in the Middle East. While the United States pretends to be the “foremost promoter of democracy” in the region, the reality seems to be much different from what the mainstream media is trying to convey. A closer look at the recent developments in Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq reveals quite a different picture. In what follows, we will try to show how the elections held under conditions of occupation serve not the interests of the peoples in these coun-

tries, but US imperialism and corporate interests in the region.

Afghanistan: the continuing power of warlords and the opium economy

After the fall of the Taliban in 2002 President Bush introduced President Hamid Karzai as the interim leader to establish democracy in Afghanistan. The October 2004 elections conducted by the UN formally brought Karzai to power as the president of the new republic. Parliamentary elections will take place in the summer of 2005. On the face of it, these events bring hope to Afghans that some form of democ-

cracy, or at the very least, rule of law, will develop in Afghanistan. Indeed, in relation to the chaos and the carnage of Iraq, Afghanistan may even seem – from a distance – to be a victory in George W. Bush’s so-called ‘War on Terror’. However, democracy entails more than just elections: it entails the *democratization* of society. And when examined, not much hope can be placed in a democracy that is imported by the US and imposed on the people of Afghanistan.

The obstacles to democratization in Afghanistan are overwhelming. Economic, social and political conditions will make real democracy – as opposed to America’s show piece elections – much more difficult to achieve. In general, the social and economic situation of the country is very grim. Opium production has exploded. Since the fall of the Taliban, poppy cultivation and opium production have increased from 35% (2003) to 69% (2004-05) of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP), as most families depend on its growth and sale for their survival (UN facts). Being the most lucrative crop on the market, farmers have turned to poppy cultivation to supplement the meagre earnings they receive from the cultivation of traditional food crops. According to a British new agency “opium is not just part of the economy; aside from international aid and military spending, it is the economy.” This opium economy forms the basis of the power of the warlords: farmers sell the poppies to the warlords and in return, the warlords provide them with the protection and services that the central state has failed to provide.

Despite the influx of international aid, most Afghans still live in abject poverty and have little access



to healthcare. Overall, poverty levels remain high and the only well paid jobs are those with the NGO's, which are very limited in number and are inaccessible to the average Afghan.

Outside of Kabul, the condition of women has not improved much since the fall of the Taliban because no institutions have been established to enhance women's inclusion in society. It will be a long and hard process for women to achieve any status in Afghan society and these sham elections cannot guarantee anything for them.

The political barriers to democracy are equally daunting. Establishing peace and stability in Afghanistan would entail dealing with a whole host of issues, ranging from the power of provincial warlords to the continuing threat of the Taliban. Despite being deposed from power, the Taliban have not disappeared. Rather, they have merely fled across the border to Pakistan where they have regrouped in the province of Baluchistan. While Pakistan's military has assured that they will crack down on Islamic militants within its own border (a border that the Americans cannot cross), there is little to suggest that the Pakistani state is doing much to root out members of the Taliban – many of whom openly preach hatred against America and the 'infidel' Muslims who collaborate with them.

Yet, the most significant internal barrier to democracy and stability is the power of warlords. Possessing private armies that collectively dwarf the size of the national army, and commanding the loyalty – through consent or coercion – of the residents of their provinces, the warlords represent a countervailing political force that challenges the sovereignty of the central state. Initially, the strategy of dealing with the warlords was through a dual process of cooptation and demilitarization. Prior to the Presidential elections of October 9th, many powerful warlords enjoyed positions of power in the interim government. However, attempts to disarm the warlords were conducted by the Ministry of Defence,

which itself was run by 'former' warlord Marshal Mohammad Fahim. Not surprisingly, rival warlords were reluctant to disband their militias due to this fact. Since his election as president, however, Karzai has purged the new government of all but one provincial warlord: Ismail Khan of Herat province. Prominent warlords such as Rashid Dostum, Yanis Quanooni and even former Defense Minister Marshal Mohammad Fahim have been excluded from cabinet. Thus far, the response from these excluded warlords has been a conspicuous silence.

Karzai and his American backers are therefore faced with a conundrum. As the main barrier to democracy, the warlords need to be defeated or at least marginalized as countervailing political forces. Yet, their military power and their role in the maintenance of the opium economy makes such a possibility increasingly difficult. To destroy their power, Karzai would need to destroy the opium economy. But in so doing, the central state would be destroying the livelihoods of the very people they are attempting to win over. If they attempt to co-opt the warlords, there is nothing to prevent the re-emergence of factionalism and civil war that occurred in the early 1990s. The elections that might appear as a first step towards democracy at first sight, instead camouflage the actual conflicts that are pertinent in Afghanistan.

Palestine: a further attempt to narrow the scope of the struggle

The January 9th presidential election in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was greeted by George W. Bush as "a historic day for the Palestinian people and the people of the Middle East." Across the world, politicians congratulated the Palestinian people for choosing Abu Mazen with an apparently overwhelming 62% majority and giving the new President a mandate to resume negotiations with the Israeli government.

Reality, however, was far removed from the rosy picture seemingly

given by the commentary accompanying these elections. While George Bush asserted that Abu Mazen's "large-size vote" indicated Palestinians ascribed to his "vision of democracy", the response from Palestinians around the world indicated a solid rejection of the entire process.

US interest in these elections was high – particularly concern over the turnout figure – because of the need for the both the US and Israeli governments to provide a veneer of legitimacy to the post-Arafat Palestinian leadership. Abu Mazen had long been groomed as a favourite of the US government due to his opposition to the current Palestinian uprising and his willingness to relinquish the right of return of Palestinian refugees. Abu Mazen and his deputy Abu Ala were the key architects of the 1993 Oslo Accords, a disastrous treaty with the Israeli government that was sold as a permanent peace settlement but in reality led to the formation of isolated Palestinian cantons divided from each other by Israeli settlements and military checkpoints. Both Abu Mazen and Abu Ala are widely seen by Washington and Tel Aviv as the best chance for ending the uprising.

A central organizing principle of the Palestinian national liberation movement has always been the unity of the people despite geographic dispersion. One of the aims of both US and Israeli strategy since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 has been to narrow the scope of the Palestinian struggle to only those living in these areas.

The election was restricted to eligible voters in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, around 1.8 million people according to the Central Elections Commission. While the media portrayed this election as bringing with it a mandate for a renewal of negotiations, the vast majority of the Palestinian population, including at least 7 million refugees, had no input or vote. For this reason, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Syria, as well as organizations in the broader diaspora issued statements condemning →

the elections as an attempt to subvert the broader principles of the Palestinian liberation movement.

During the two-week election campaign period, 32 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli military. None of the candidates were permitted to travel freely except for Abu Mazen. In occupied Jerusalem, only a tiny number of voters (5300 out of an estimated 120,000) were permitted to register by the Israeli government.

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, most media reports gave a turnout figure somewhere in the region of 65-70% of eligible voters with Abu Mazen gaining 62% of this number. This turnout figure appears to be, however, a media fabrication. According to an official statement by the Palestinian Central Elections Commission, 775,114 people cast a vote in the elections. The total number of eligible voters was approximately 1.8 million. In other words, around 42% of eligible voters actually voted on the day of the election. Even assuming a 62% majority, less than 25% of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip gave support to Abu Mazen.

Indeed, numerous reports indicated that the turnout in the early afternoon of the electionday was around the 30% mark. At 4 pm, just before the polling booths were scheduled to close, Palestinian police and armed individuals associated with Abu Mazen surrounded the Central Elections Commission office in Ramallah and began firing shots at the building. A rushed meeting was held and the CEC decided to extend voting hours by an extra two hours. Voting procedures were also changed with people who were not registered suddenly permitted to vote in an effort to increase the voter turnout.

Confirming this interference, 46 members of the Palestinian Central Elections Commission resigned on 15 January in protest at the voting irregularities and the role of the Palestinian Authority in subverting the process. Ammar Dweik, deputy chairman of the CEC and leader of the mass resignations, stated that he "was personally threatened and pressured" by armed

supporters of Abu Mazen.

The poor turnout was partly a result of a decision by the main opposition parties Hamas and Islamic Jihad to boycott the elections. The ruling party, Fatah, despite deciding to appoint Abu Mazen as Arafat's successor is racked by a number of different factions and political standpoints. Central to understanding the dynamic of Fatah is the impact of the Intifada on the grassroots membership. A large layer of Fatah opposes the current leadership and supports the continuation of the uprising. This message was loudly proclaimed on 13 January when Fatah members in conjunction with other resistance factions carried out a sophisticated military attack against an Israeli checkpoint in Gaza, killing 6 Israelis.

The main left organization, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), endorsed Mustafa Barghouti, a prominent figure in the Ramallah NGO scene. The decision by the PFLP to endorse Barghouti took many by surprise, given the PFLP's rejection of the Oslo process. The General Secretary of the PFLP is currently being held in a Palestinian Authority prison near Jericho regardless of the fact he has never been charged or faced trial for any offence. The election results indicate that Abu Mazen's attempt to end the Intifada will be much more difficult than the US and Israeli governments had earlier believed.

Iraq: elections and the impasse of US imperialism

With the successive crumbling of the main pillars of justification for Iraqi invasion, the Bush administration has intensified its rhetoric of "democratization" in the Middle East. The installation of a democratic government in Iraq would allegedly ignite sparks of democratic reforms in other Middle Eastern countries. Holding a "successful" election in Iraq became a key to the implementation of the American project in Middle East. There are those however who argue that with the failure of the US military

to establish security and stability in Iraq — in light of the growing resistance to imperialist forces — the American project in the Middle East has already reached a dead end. For them, the election was a means for the US to seek an exit strategy that did not damage US interests. The electoral quest, however, has proven to be so messy that it is difficult to conclude that the elections will bring enough peace and stability to provide the Bush administration with an honourable exit strategy, or the sparks needed to bring about the desired changes in the political landscape of the region. The US orchestrated election in the long-term, in reality, is likely at best to be irrelevant, at worst to plunge Iraq deeper into the abyss.

The credibility of elections held under the shadow of occupation is questionable from different angles. The outcome of a managed election under which the occupying power has a free hand to engage in covert operation to skew balloting in favor of puppet candidates is difficult to present as the verdict of Iraqi people. It is in fact due to the presence of occupation and the concerns that the election would consolidate the power of those who assisted the invaders that Sunnis and progressive forces refused to participate in this managed election. While Shiites and Kurds declared their enthusiasm to follow the US deadline, prominent organizations and parties such as the influential Muslim Scholars Association and the Iraq National Foundation Conference comprising prominent Shiite, Sunni, Pan-Arabists and Marxists called for a boycott of the election. Furthermore, according to the New York Times & CBC, a majority of Iraqis abroad appeared reluctant to vote and refused to sign up for the elections. The refusal of the January 30 election by the Sunnis and progressive secular organizations will inevitably tarnish the legitimacy of the election outcome, which in turn is bound to further intensify religious and sectarian divisions in Iraq.

In addition, the eclipse of political debate casts further doubt on the

democratic nature of process of election. It is due to the fear of attacks by Iraqi resistance that neither the candidate names nor the places of polling locations have been specified. Under a “campaign in shadow” or “the first stealth election campaign in history”, as a Western diplomat put it, the process of election suffered from the absence of policy debate and normal democratic ritual of communication between candidates and voters. Furthermore, the UN and other international organizations refused to go to Iraq to supervise the election. In the absence of international monitoring, the confidence in the outcome of Iraqi election is bound to be undermined. As Simon Chesleman, the head of the Institute for International Law and Justice at New York University, has pointed out ‘elections whose results are not believed are worse than no elections at all’.

Lack of credibility and procedural abnormalities are not the only problematic issues in this election. As Sabah Al Mukhtar, the London-based President of the League of Arab Lawyers argues, the election is not alone fatally flawed, it is illegal. “Under the Vienna Convention, an occupying force has no right to change the composition of occupied territories socially, culturally, educationally or politically. This election was based on the laws laid down by former ‘Viceroy’ American Paul Bremer and is entirely unconstitutional. Bremer personally appointed the overseers for the election.”

Far from ‘free and fair’ and heralding Iraqi ‘democracy’ they are entirely engineered by the Bush administration to serve specific imperialist interests. After all, no election in a country invaded and controlled by foreign troops can conceivably be regarded as free and fair. Holding elections under the umbrella of occupation, the refusal of a large portion of the population to participate in the election, the lack of policy debates and the absence of credible international monitoring agencies are cumulatively geared to depict this managed election as a theatrical exhibition of democra-

tization. The doubt over the legitimacy of the outcome of Iraqi election would not only embolden the Iraqi resistance to intensify their operation but it would also have “a great potential for deepening the conflict” between Shiites and Sunnis as Brent Scowcroft, former National Security Advise, has suggested. Instead of facilitating the imperial reconfiguration of the region, the Iraqi election has a potent potential to exacerbate the quagmire in which the United States has plunged.

What can the left do in Canada?

The three cases of Middle East democracy under occupation show clearly that not much hope can be placed in a democracy that is imported by the US and imposed on the peoples of the region under occupation. It is particularly important in this context that progressive forces in Canada should expose Canada’s involvement, or aspirations to get involved, in the

imperialist policies of the United States in the region. The decision of the Paul Martin cabinet to send observers to the Iraqi elections and possibly to train security forces should be opposed knowing that any assistance to the illegitimate government of Iraq in its repression of its own people would mean, far from promoting them, backstabbing the concepts of freedom, human rights and democracy. The March 19 international day of action against the war in Iraq will be a crucial opportunity for showing that the Left is not only against US policies but also against Canada’s complicity in its’ imperial project. **R**

Middle East Socialists Network of Canada (MESN-Canada) was formed this year by a group of socialists in Toronto who aim to engage in political work in Canada around Middle Eastern issues. For further information about the group, please contact CanadaMESN@yahoo.ca.



Quebec: Toward a New Left Party in 2005?

Richard Fidler

Quebec's new left party, the Union des forces progressistes (UFP), itself the product of a regroupment process, hopes to continue this process through a projected merger with Option citoyenne (Citizen's option, or OC). The two groups are now engaged in formal negotiations with the goal of combining forces by the end of 2005. At present the UFP claims about 1300 members, the OC 1500.

At a November membership convention, Option citoyenne voted by a substantial majority to appoint a negotiating committee which would meet at intervals with UFP representatives to discuss various "themes" and establish and clarify points of agreement and disagreement. A further national meeting of OC will be held in the spring of 2005 to discuss the process and develop OC's position on issues such as the national question, about which OC members are deeply divided.

This process will continue through the summer, with the perspective of creating by the end of the year a new party "centered on the public interest, social justice, respect for the environment, equality between men and women and solidarity among peoples".

In December, the UFP's Council accepted the OC's proposal. Negotiating committees from the two groups have held three joint meetings since mid-December, most recently on February 6. Both groups report wide agreement on the topics discussed so far: the economy, feminism and "functioning and culture of a left-wing party", according to perfunctory reports submitted to the members of the two organizations.

Different political cultures

Understandably, there is much optimism and hope in both groups that

the process will result in a party of several thousand members with a correspondingly greater political impact and attraction than the two groups could have as separate organizations. However, a number of key issues need to be clarified if this potential is to be realized.

It is already clear that a new party will not simply be a larger version of the UFP. For one thing, the fusion process involves two groups with somewhat different backgrounds and orientations.

The UFP, which describes itself as "independentist, feminist, ecologist and internationalist", was formed in 2002 in the wake of the enthusiasm generated by the massive demonstrations at the Quebec Summit of the Americas, the mobilizations around the World March of Women, and a successful by-election campaign in Montreal's Mercier riding in which the candidate of a broad coalition of left groups and community grass-roots activists won 24% of the popular vote.



The party was initiated by an informal coalition of three groups: the Rassemblement pour l'alternative politique (RAP); the Quebec Communist party; and the Parti de la démocratie socialiste (PDS), all of

which became affiliated "entities" or formal tendencies within the UFP. (The RAP has since dissolved, DS is now Québec socialiste, and the International Socialists became an entity in November 2002.) But most of the UFP's members are individuals not aligned with any of these formations.

The UFP's founding platform, adopted after wide debate by the members, sets out clear positions and demands on international solidarity, rejection of imperialist military alliances and capitalist trade and investment agreements, and defense and extension of workers', womens' and immigrants' rights and social programs, etc. Although the UFP does not define itself as anticapitalist or socialist, that is the thrust of its platform. And two of its founding principles were opposition to the parties of "neoliberalism", including the Parti québécois, and support for the independence of Quebec.

Option citoyenne originated as one of three groupings or "options" that developed in a discussion within D'abord solidaires, an ad hoc coalition formed before the 2003 Quebec general election to defend social programs and fight the far right-wing party led by Mario Dumont, Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ), which at one point in the months before the election was registering 40 percent support in public opinion polls. D'abord solidaires was officially indifferent between the governing Parti québécois and the opposition Liberals, not opposing a vote for either as a "lesser evil" to the ADQ.

The OC option favoured political action to the left of the PQ, although it initially rejected an invitation to join the UFP. In the summer of 2004, OC leader Françoise David, a former president of the Quebec womens federation (FFQ), toured the province promoting her book *Le Bien*

commun (the “common good” or “public interest”) and probing support for a new left party independent of the UFP. David encountered much support for uniting the political forces to the left of the PQ and widespread criticism of her support for “asymmetrical federalism”. David has since come out in favour of both unity with the UFP and Quebec independence.



To some degree the UFP and OC represent different milieus. The UFP’s members include young people from the *altermondialiste* global justice movement — internationalist, anticapitalist, and strong supporters of Quebec independence — along with an older layer of members, many with long experience in left and far-left politics. The political experience of many OC members, on the other hand, has been within feminist and community organizations — 60% are women — and in local organizing around tenants’ rights, food and housing co-ops and the like, where the politics of consensus and accommodation of conflicting views and even interests are valued.

UFP observers at its November convention found that OC had few members under the age of 25, and “very few” trade union members. On the other hand, its predominantly female membership would compensate for the gender imbalance in the UFP, where only a quarter of the members are women.

An anticapitalist party?

Option citoyenne, while defining itself to the left of the PQ, is certainly not anticapitalist. Its program, in so far as it is developed, reads at best like a pale echo of the classic social democracy long associated with the NDP. For example, at its Novem-

ber convention the members adopted a resolution on “the economy” that contained few specifics while promoting “values and principles” such as economic security, distribution of wealth, democratic participation, the regulatory role of the state, etc. — all of which is completely compatible with liberal or “neoliberal” capitalism. A resolution opposing trade and investment deals that are “opposed to our fundamental values” (without naming any specific deal) was simply tabled. The capitalist state was described as “an instrument of the community” and “guarantor of the public interest”. Similar positions are developed at length in Françoise David’s book. David and OC do not mention the NATO and NORAD alliances, opposition to which is a basic plank in the UFP platform. OC has no position at present on Quebec independence.

Is the OC a clear break from the PQ? Significantly, the OC resolutions do not mention the PQ. But in her book, David says the left should not “contribute to the re-election of the Liberals”, and that “When the elections come, we will see what we have to say to the PQ”. These statements, of course, are not inconsistent with the lesser-evil politics she and D’abord solidaires defended in the 2003 election. In fact, David states on the very first page of her book that she does not want to be “the Ralph Nader of Quebec and contribute to the defeat of the PQ” as U.S. Democrats allege Nader helped defeat them in 2000.

Fusing organizations with such different political cultures is unlikely to be a smooth process, notwithstanding the agreement on rather abstract principles professed by both groups. A major challenge is clearly the conflict between, on the one hand, the UFP’s support of Quebec independence and opposition to the PQ and, on the other, OC’s tendency to adapt to the PQ despite its own ambiguity and divisions on the national question. At its December Council meeting, the UFP identified opposition to the PQ and support for independence as “principles” that should in its view be adopted by a new

party. It is common ground for most members of the UFP that a party seeking to outflank the PQ must be independentist.

The ambiguities of Option citoyenne have prompted a few members of the UFP to question whether the new party will be as independent of the PQ as the UFP now is. In articles posted on the UFP’s web site and intranet, they draw attention to statements by David and others, including a few UFP leaders, indicating that the party might consider a deal by which, for example, the PQ declines to contest one or more ridings against the left and in return the left desists from running against the PQ. Any such deal, these critics point out, would make the new party a hostage of the PQ and discredit its claim to be a consistent opponent of “neoliberalism”. The new party would become a barrier to building an anticapitalist movement if it degenerated into a left appendage of the PQ.

Debate just beginning

The fusion debate in both the UFP and OC is still in its early stages. So far it has focused on relations with the PQ and election strategy. It may well expand to cover other topics relevant to the fusion.

One topic both UFP and OC activists might consider is the history of previous attempts to build a united party of the left in Quebec. For example, in the 1960s Quebec supporters of the Canadian “new party”, the NDP, attempted to build an autonomous counterpart in Quebec, the Parti socialiste du Québec (PSQ), that was sympathetic to the nationalist upsurge. In the early 1980s another attempt was made to build a united left party, the Mouvement socialiste. Both the PSQ and MS failed but there are valuable lessons to be learned from those experiences.

A much more positive development occurred in the early 1970s, when all three major union centrals in Quebec — the FTQ, CSN and CEQ — debated and adopted radical →

anticapitalist manifestoes. While only the CSN's was explicitly pro-socialist, all three advanced the concept that working people should take control of society. A labour-based municipal party in Montreal, the Front d'action politique, or FRAP (headed by Paul Cliche, now a leader of the UFP) campaigned around the central slogan "Les salariés au pouvoir" — workers to power. For a while it seemed that Quebec labour might manage to establish a mass workers party.

Unfortunately, this movement was subsequently deflected into support for the PQ. Much smaller parties to the "left" of the PQ (such as the Maoists), opposed to Quebec independence, were unable to mount successful resistance to that diversion.

But today the PQ, after a total of 18 years in office, stands exposed to many for its anti-labour, anti-worker record. And while the labour movement is still reeling under the blows of the neoliberal offensive, there are encouraging signs that politics are returning to the agenda in the unions. In the fall of 2003, the unions spearheaded massive demonstrations in opposition to the Charest government's assault on union rights and social programs, even forcing the government to retreat on

some of its objectives. Although the strike movement eventually fizzled, the march of more than 100,000 workers in Montreal last May Day demonstrated the ongoing potential for a militant labour-based fightback.

These developments indicate the need for the new party to start probing the possibilities to link up with militants in the unions — the natural constituency for an anticapitalist party — and to develop a long-term strategy for building a class-struggle socialist tendency in the labour movement. The new party needs to renew and pursue the positive legacy of the union manifestoes, not the discredited record of futile lesser-evil reliance on the PQ and other capitalist saviours.

Significantly, opponents of the UFP and Option citoyenne are already mobilizing in the unions. For example, a new grouping, Syndicalistes et progressistes pour un Québec libre (SPQ-Libre), initiated in part by some leaders of the major union centrals, is attempting to channel "progressive" trade unionists and working-class sovereigntists into the PQ where it will function as a recognized "club". So the PQ remains a key issue for debate both in left unity initiatives and within the broader working class milieu.

These and many other challenges will have to be worked through in the months ahead as the fusion process proceeds. The process would be advanced, in my opinion, if the two groups could now develop some joint campaigns in which their respective memberships work and discuss with each other and begin to build a common organizational framework in which agreements can be solidified and disagreements can be clarified and resolved.

Of course, in the new party there need not and will not be 100% unity on all issues, even some important ones. Many questions can be resolved through common action and debate within the unified party — especially a party characterized by rank-and-file democracy with pluralist structures that recognize tendency rights, as the UFP has pledged to establish. **R**

For further information:

UFP:
<http://www.ufp.qc.ca/>

Option citoyenne:
<http://www.optioncitoyenne.ca/>

Turning Back Refugees:

Harmonizing Canada's Migration Laws with the United States

Govind Rao

Anyone under the impression that the pressure for 'North Americanizing' our migration policy originates from the U.S., should take a look at the recent "Safe 3rd country agreement" signed between Canada and the United States. The agreement came into force on December 29, 2004, allows for the return of a refugee applicants to the United States without hearing their claim, if it can be determined they entered Canada from the United States. (One exception is if the applicant already has a relative resident in Canada.) Having already been resident

in a 'safe' country - our government considers the U.S. to be a safe country - the refugee claimant is expected to make his/her claim there.

Since around a third of Asylum-seekers arrive in Canada via the United States, the government has good reason to expect the agreement will cut refugee applications by around 10000 a year. But the cost to those who would have sought asylum in Canada is severe. First of all, Muslim refugees have reason to doubt that the United States can be a safe haven for them. Starting in September 2001 and running until

December 2003, over 177,000 nationals from predominantly Muslim countries were required to add their fingerprints, eye scans and names to a 'security registry'. In the process, many were detained under terrorist suspicions and/or deported. Refugees may decide it is better to remain undocumented than to risk that fate. Or, many predict, people may attempt to cross undetected into Canada to make their claim, risking personal security at the hands of people smugglers and dangerous river crossings.

Second, the US does not recog-

nize some grounds for persecution - like gender persecution - to the same extent as does Canada. So a woman may have a perfectly sound case as a refugee in Canada, but will be turned back at the border, rejected in the US, and deported to her home country. The US system also makes much greater use of detention (of children also) to restrict the movement of refugee applicants before their decisions are brought down. The US also has a lower refugee-acceptance rate. The result of all this will be that people who should have received asylum in Canada will be deported home to be killed or imprisoned.

In adopting a safe 3rd country agreement, Canada and the United States are moving closer to a European-style migration system, one that increases controls and restrictions on immigrants and refugees, creating a "Fortress North America". Continental integration in Europe has meant easier movement for Europeans within the EU, but has resulted in increasingly anti-immigrant and refugee policies adopted by the EU as a whole. There is a price to be paid for the dismantlement of borders and it is borne almost entirely by desperate migrants from the Global South, political or economic refugees. The distinction between the two is arbitrary. If you are going to be killed by your government, or starved slowly by the market, who is to say which is worse?

Civil Liberties, Migration Policy, and the Left

The Liberals would have you believe that this is another step in "securing North America's" borders. But that would ignore the fact that between 1995-97, the Canadian government had attempted to get the Americans to agree to a safe 3rd country agreement, but was unsuccessful. Most of the evidence points to this having again been the imitative of the Canadian government. It underscores the difficulty often, when it comes to migration policy, of figuring out 1) what are changes the Canadian government is bringing in

for its own interests, 2) what changes are a result of American pressures for security concerns, or 3) what changes are the result of pressures of continentalism.

The result of over 100 years of deep economic integration with the United States means that the economy of most Canadian provinces is dependent upon easy access to the American market. The scale of exports to the United States certainly makes many



jobs very vulnerable to pressure the US puts on us to conform to border security. And, the cost of deep integration is becoming clearer. Attempts to preserve sovereignty in the migration policy field meets this fundamental aspect of how our economy has been constructed. Which is why, of course, the Canadian government has instituted significant changes in its laws, and attempted to placate the Americans with a number of 'security' investigations - Maher Arar, Project

Thread, the Secret Trial Five - to ensure access to the American market remains open. The price of U.S. market access is a price being paid, frankly, by anyone who appears to a Canadian border guard as 'suspicious' or 'middle-eastern', and Muslim-Canadians generally through the heightened activity of CSIS targeting that community.

It should be clear to Canadians that the price of our economic strategy is no longer simply our economic, cultural, and political soul, but now the rights of refugees to protection, immigrant Canadians to equal treatment with native-born Canadians, and principles of open trials and a free society. It is also the case that the Canadian government is taking advantage of a climate of perceived insecurity to grab civil liberties. In Canada, looking back on our history, the main segments of our society who suffer when this happens are immigrants and labour activists.

As socialists we face a difficult question in how to proceed. The interests of workers whose jobs depend on easy-access to the US market (and Canadian conformity to the US security agenda) apparently conflict with many Canadians concerns that the fall-out from that agenda is resulting in the detention and harassment of immigrants and Muslim-Canadians. This will be a very difficult nut to crack, as it lies at the heart of the many strings that tie us to the American Empire. **R**

Socialist Interventions Pamphlet Series

The Auto Industry	\$2
Concretizing Working Class Solidarity: Internationalism Beyond Slogans By Sam Gindin	
Whose Violence?	\$2
Imperial State Security and the Global Justice Movement By Leo Panitch	

The Council of Canadians in Windsor: A Worker's Response

Richard Harding

On January 11, 2005 the Council of Canadians held a forum in Windsor as part of its cross Canada initiative to discuss deeper integration with the United States. The Forum has gone under the titled *Crossing the Line: A Citizen's Inquiry on Canada-U.S. Relations*. Border issues were the central theme of the Windsor forum. It is no secret that Windsor is a major crossing point in the North American market and the Council was very interested in the impact this has had on workers in the city and surrounding areas.

The meeting was chaired by Maude Barlow who was accompanied by Howard Pawley, a former Manitoba premier (NDP), and Howard McCurdy, a former Windsor NDP MP. The early session saw presentations from Mary Ann Cuderman, of the Windsor West Community truck

watch whose focus has been the impact of truck traffic on the people of the area closest to the Ambassador Bridge. Bruce Campbell of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative spoke about the big business driven agenda of a customs union, monetary union and a common North American market. The next two speakers presented reports that were quite disturbing about the new business agenda.

Hugh Benevides of the Canadian Environmental Law Association explained that in a meeting with members of the privy council he felt as if he was "speaking to aliens" on the issue of environmental regulation. While he believes the government has a public protection mandate to maintain regulatory regimes and enforce them, his impression was that this was not a focus of those in power today. Benevides' presentation was a cogent precursor to that of Michael Gilbertson, a retired scientist who worked with the International Joint Commission and author of the Gilbertson/Brophy report.

Gilbertson and Brophy discovered several disturbing trends in the Windsor area, as well as other communities in the Great Lakes region, including elevated levels of Cancer, heart abnormalities in children, excess hospitalizations, birth defects, and deaths. He linked this

to the high levels of pollutants in the air and water due to industry in the area. During his report Gilbertson explained that he "scared himself" working in Windsor and that despite his and Brophy's findings the government bureaucracies have been silent on the Great Lakes and that "environmental health has not been perceived as a necessity". NAFTA has done nothing to improve this situation as the spirit of the IJC, the mutual protection of shared bodies of water, has been ignored under the free trade regime.



This presentation led into the afternoon where citizens were given the opportunity to make their opinions known on the issue of the border and deeper integration with the US. Enver Villamazar of CPC-ML made an informative presentation on the SMART border plan which, among other things, spells out a plan to have American agents on the Canadian side of the border pre-clearing trucks in an 8km deep security zone.

Next up was yours truly. After listening to the previous speakers it was difficult to be composed. I explained that all the previously presented evidence convinced me that the time has come for workers in Windsor and throughout Canada to discuss the nature of the Canadian state. It was crucial, I explained, that we imagine a government that sees to our needs, as what currently holds sway certainly does not. Deeper integration with the US to a Canadian worker means constant insecurity, depressed wages, vicious anti-worker legislation, sickness and potential destitution. My evidence of this was not only what I heard during the day, but the practices of the state, especially at the provincial and federal levels, in the last decade or more of free trade. Under the auspices of 'harmonization' with the US Canadian workers have been subjected to attacks on

all the gains they have made the last one hundred years. I submitted that fear has been the prevailing feeling in the workplace. Fear of corporate pull-outs if we are too aggressive in our demands or if we simply fight for what we have. So called free trade has threatened us more than it has offered.

I lamented the fact that none of Windsor's labour leaders were in attendance and that the labour movement in general has been unable (and unwilling) to fight the issue of integration head on. The words of Ken Georgetti on North American integration in a recent speech to the CLC ("an egg is not easily unscrambled") were symptomatic of the malaise of Canadian labour regarding the issue. The statement of CAW president Buzz Hargrove regarding the environment in Windsor ("when I talk to workers their main priority is jobs, not the environment") during an alternative fuels vehicle conference flew in the face of the brutal reality Gilbertson and Brophy presented to Windsor. Economics alone has been the prevailing ideology of the Canadian labour movement, and workers often bear the terrible cost of this policy.

I have neglected the questions and opinions of the commissioners, who were all insightful and probing. McCurdy challenged Villamazar and I to outline what would happen to Windsor and Canada if we were to reject US demands regarding the border and Canadian policies in the economic and political realms. Howard Pawley solicited our

opinions on the state of Canadian universities, especially in regard to prevailing ideology. Discussion on these questions and others took place among the commissioners and everyone in attendance. The discussion displayed both the unity and the divisions among activists, on both sides of the border, as there were many Americans in attendance, on the issue of North American integration.

The event rapped up in the evening at the Capital Theatre where the commissioners summed up the day's discussions. Bruce Campbell made a presentation outlining what the corporate driven deep integration agenda entails and Barlow made an impassioned plea for those of us against it to keep fighting. There was no shortage of people willing to raise questions. If time permitted, the discussion would have went well into the early morning hours.

I could not help but be impressed by the Council's initiative and its attempt to reach out and listen to people, especially working people. The Council's position on North American integration and its strategy to combat it through dialogue with Canadians has been an important exercise in popular education. The Council of Canadians will prove to be a valuable ally in the fight for popular sovereignty in Canada and a potent obstacle to those who seek to subordinate all of our lives to the private accumulation of profit and power. **R**

Richard Harding is active in CAW in the Windsor area.



Confidential Task Force Document Reveals Business Agenda for Canada

A confidential document from the Task Force on the Future of North America confirms the worst fears of opponents of free trade and NAFTA: Canada's business elite are planning to push the country toward deeper integration with the United States, including abandoning protections for culture and fresh water.

The task force is a joint project of the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) in the U.S., the Mexican Council of Foreign Relations (MCFR), and the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE). It is co-chaired by former Deputy Prime Minister John Manley and Tom d'Aquino, Chief Executive of the CCCE. The document, reported in today's Toronto Star, is a summary of the task force's first meeting, which took place in Toronto in October 2004. The task force has also met in New York and Monterrey, and is expected to release its recommendations in April 2005.

The Council of Canadians has just wrapped up cross-Canada hearings on Canada-U.S. relations. A final report from the hearings will be available in March 2005.

The Polaris Institute also held a major meeting of civil society groups in Ottawa in mid-February, 2005, under the title 'Canadian Security Check!'. It is their view that the time has come for civil society groups in Canada — labour unions, environmental groups, public interest organizations, faith-justice networks, womens' associations, human rights groups, anti-poverty and peace organizations — to assemble for the purpose of developing a common analysis and response to the new political agenda that the task force is sponsoring. A new campaign might be expected to emerge from these quarters as well.

The confidential document is available on the Council of Canadians' web site at <http://www.canadians.org>.

Against Racism

Greg Albo

Theodore W. Allen was a working class intellectual, activist and author. He died on 19 January 2005 at the age of 85 in Brooklyn, N.Y. His books on the 'inventions of the white race' were some of the most important to examine American racism, and, in particular, the formation of 'whiteness' as a particular social division that was neither natural or inevitable, but rather foremost a political characteristic formed in the US as a result of the struggles over slavery. Allen's argument was that the 'white race' emerged as a ruling class strategy in response to labour unrest in the 17th and 18th century American colonies. 'Whiteness' held Euro-Americans together, and placed working class Euro-Americans against Afro-Americans, gaining

for 'whites' both structural societal and labour market advantages. This division became a defining feature of American political life, and a central barrier to developing working-class politics in the US. If this racial divide – the creation of 'whiteness' also being the formation of the so-called 'negro problem' – was not natural, neither was it merely 'socially-constructed' for Allen, to be dispensed with by an alternate discourse of identity. Modern racism formed alongside modern capitalism, and thus the social processes and structures of capitalism would also tend to reproduce the racial division. Anti-capitalist politics in the American case – for that was his central focus in writing and activism – would also have to be anti-racist.

Allen's two volume history *The Invention of the White Race* (1994; 1997) is one of the most important Marxian accounts of race in the US. Other important books on 'whiteness' are David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991) and his *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* (1994); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish became White* (1995); and Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (2001). On American blacks from the other side of the divide, there are a huge number of important books. A few of these are: Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (1993); Max Shachtman, *Race and Revolution* (1933); Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (1981); and W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935). **R**

WSF Report Back

The V World Social Forum 2005, Porto Alegre, Brazil

Carolyn Watson and Carlos Torres

The fifth World Social Forum which took place once again in Porto Alegre, Brazil between 26 and 31 January 2005 demonstrated that, just as the challenges to neo-liberalism are able to adapt themselves according to need, so too is the best large scale alternative to the World Economic Forum. Unlike previous years, the event took place outdoors, along the city's waterfront. Tents, divided into eleven thematic sections labeled A to K, followed the shoreline of the Guaíba River for several kilometers (imagine tents stretching along the Toronto waterfront from the Humber River to Cherry Beach with a youth camp in High Park!). The Forum attracted over 150,000 people while 20,000 young people participated in the youth camp.

This year's Forum planners attempted to democratize the Forum's

activities, talks, and events by taking them out of the seclusion of the academy (where they had been in the past) and making them more publicly accessible. To achieve this goal, architects and planners from India flew to Porto Alegre and shared their knowledge of how to design a temporary community of tents (as they had done for the fourth World Social Forum held in Mumbai last year) with local Forum planners. The resultant atmosphere resembled a bazaar of information, activities and events that Forum participants could sample and experience. Participants in the Forum were free to attend events that had direct significance for them or they had the option of wandering into talks or workshops that caught their attention as they passed by. They could also view films, documentaries, and art events. Other changes that de-

mocratized the Forum included a lower registration fee for individuals, groups and organizations.

Of course, noble plans always have their weaknesses and the tent community was no exception. To ventilate the tents, plastic walls had to be removed, and once the walls were removed, unpleasant odors from a nearby creek wafted in. The scorching weather, the smell of sewage and the whirlwinds of dust from the unpaved roads mingled inside the tents with Forum participants.

Many events were organized as lecture panels of academic and political "stars"; they did not allow for effective interaction between presenters and audiences and resulted in discord when audiences could not be comfortably accommodated by each tent's seating capacity. One such event, in which

Emir Sader, Boaventura de Souza Santos, John Holloway and Michael Hardt spoke on “Another World is Possible Without Taking Power,” took place in a warehouse on the docks that should have been able to accommodate several hundred people. Organizers had set up chairs inside the warehouse, as they had for other events. But the degree of interest in the talk was so high that the chairs could not accommodate everyone. Crowded and frustrated participants began chanting, “Tirar cadeira, tirar cadeira! (Remove the chairs, remove the chairs!).” People with chairs jealously guarded them and refused to budge until ten minutes after the chanting had begun when a young woman stood up and raised her chair over her head, passing it toward one of the doors. Others quickly followed her initiative and within minutes there was enough space for the people trapped in doorways to move inside. Some participants, however, continued to defend their rights to chairs, creating an interesting dynamic between those who had chairs, those who sat on the floor, and those who gave up their chairs to create room for more participants, making it clear that even friendly comrades can sometimes be resistant to demands from the masses.

On a much larger scale, the organization of the WSF still remains hierarchical, reluctant to share resources, and somehow lacking in democracy. Most alarmingly is a glaring lack of representation from women and non-Europeans in the International Committee that also extended to many of the panels, even though participants illustrated the diversity present in the Forum. Social organizations and NGOs, however, tended to be much better represented by women and men, as well as non-Europeans. While this lack of democracy can be attributed to a need for consensus-building, there needs to be much more room for debate. The WSF is big and still growing, and the themes it attracts are becoming significant for individuals and social movements across national, linguistic, and economic lines. The pri-

vatization of water, for example, was a theme that people discussed from economic, political, social, and environmental perspectives providing a vast array of strategies for confronting what is a growing threat in many countries and a harsh reality in several.

The decision for South Asia to hold the 2004 WSF in India could become strategically important in the future. Moving the Forum to different regions of the world might be the best political decision to shift it from a bazaar of ideas to a place for creating alternative options. There will therefore be a lot of pressure put on South Africa when it hosts the 2007 WSF, and Venezuela when it hosts the Americas section of the WSF in 2006. Venezuela in particular will be held up to a test given Hugo Chávez’ commitment to transform Venezuela, and perhaps by doing that contributing to the transformation of the Latin American reality. The main idea, nevertheless, is to demonstrate support and solidarity with a specific country in a region that is constantly harassed by the imperial interests of United States. The President of Venezuela’s declaration that the only way to overcome the failures of capitalism was by building true socialism perhaps reflects a need for more well-defined aims of the WSF and a commitment to campaigns that will deal with current issues.

The WSF is the best and only instrument the global justice movement has to resist and confront the neoliberal globalization. Yet, its limits and potential must be openly addressed or the slogan might become ‘another world social forum is possible’. The 2006 regional forums and the 2007 WSF in Africa will need to address pressing issues, both at the structural level (further democratization) and in relation to campaigns and statements (politics). If anyone believes or expects that the WSF is or will become a classical or orthodox space for political action he or she is wasting time. But, if someone is attempting to build a new political culture and a new political instrument, the Social Forums including the WSF, are the right places to be, at

least for the time being. For now, the WSF, as a worldwide historical development, will continue to grow and attract more people as long as it keep the new course, which means a ‘moving’ Forum that can motivate and provide people with political optimism and democratic practices that can make another world possible in every region of the world.

In the mean time, the effort for building power in accordance with the Zapatista trend continues, while the struggle for seizing state power and furthering its democratization, following the path of Chavez’s revolution, persists. **R**



A Festival of Radical Ideas and Visions: The European Social Forum in London

Jess MacKenzie and Ernest Tate

If the third European Social Forum in London, October, 2004, was anything to go by, the global justice movement is very much alive and well. According to the British press, it was one of the largest political assemblies ever held in London. Most of the governments of the European Union have been moving to the right and the organizers of the ESF challenged this trajectory with a call to “all those opposed to war, racism and corporate power, everyone who wants to see global justice, workers’ rights and a sustainable society” to gather in London. “Together”, they stated, “we can build a movement strong enough to demonstrate Another World Is Possible and defeat the enemies of freedom, justice and democracy.”

The gathering, by its very existence, was a loud statement against neo-liberalism in Europe, and especially against Tony Blair’s New Labour, pro-capitalist policies. More and more British people are coming to understand that Blair is prepared to go to any lengths in the service of British imperialism. Recent polls show 71% of British people want a firm date for the troops to get out of Iraq. Privatization of public services is still underway and the private and state pension systems are now under severe attack. The political climate has degenerated to levels unimaginable only a few years ago. Since 9/11, British citizens of South Asian and Arab descent have been especially targeted by the media and police for severe repression. Under new security laws, many have been persecuted and jailed. Government ministers are openly talking about bringing in an identity card system and may even take away the constitutional right to freedom of association, by making it a criminal offence to “have been in the company of” people the government think are “terror-

ists” or who have been convicted of terrorist crimes.

Around 25,000 people – some say 30,000 – participated in the three-day London event, less than the previous ESF in Paris (50,000) and the first in Florence (65,000). Its popularity was greater than the organizers had anticipated, however, and almost overwhelmed them. On the final day, Sunday, close to 1000,000 turned out for an anti-war protest on the streets of Central London.

At least half the participants in the ESF came from Britain, with the remainder from more than seventy countries. Many came from North Africa and the Middle East, with the larger delegations coming from Italy, France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands and Greece. Former Soviet Bloc countries, such as Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania were represented, and significantly, a busload of young activists traveled all the way from Moscow. Over 500 translators from an organization of European translators, known as “the Babels”, volunteered their services.

The talks and discussions were spread over several sites around Central London – at universities and trade union halls. Over 2500 speakers spoke at the more than 500 plenary sessions, panels and seminars, but the main venue was at the Alexandra Palace – a commercial exhibition facility in North London. Hundreds of artists also contributed to the proceedings with art exhibitions, the showing of over 100 films, music, drama, poetry and other cultural activities.

The ESF organizing committee, which had been meeting on a regular basis since the previous ESF, was fortunate in having the support of the Greater London Authority, and its mayor, Ken Livingstone – who only a few years ago was known as “Red Ken”

and was the bane of New Labour. Having since moderated his politics, he has become more acceptable to his old enemies. His support was not only in words, but in hard cash. The GLA contributed approximately \$1,250,000 to the preparations. Assisting Livingstone in carrying out his policies in the ESF preparations, was his team from Socialist Action, a once far-left group who long ago ditched its revolutionary politics to hitch a ride on Livingstone’s band-wagon, becoming, according to some left critics, the most loyal members of his political retinue. Some have landed jobs in his administration, one paying over \$250,000 a year.

The GLA also provided ESF registrants low-cost accommodation for more than 5000 people at the Millenium Dome and, more importantly, three-day passes to the London Transportation system, a tremendous boon to the young activists, reducing their costs enormously. By our estimate, London public transportation is more than twice as expensive as Toronto’s.

The planning committee, was in reality a broad coalition of representatives of most of the large NGOs, the Mayor’s office, the GLA, most of the left groups, with the Socialist Workers’ Party (International Socialists) taking on a critical leadership role. We heard a few complaints from some circles about some of the compromises the committee had made in selecting panelists and setting topics. For example, everyone now recognizes there was not enough discussion of women’s struggles and that this has to be remedied at the next ESF—but we heard no criticisms that the committee was exclusionary in the way it proceeded. Many trade unions participated, contributing financially and bringing total subsidies up to over \$2,500,000.

2004 european social forum

Some socialist groups complained that the compromises necessary to hold this coalition together, tended to make the platforms of the major meetings too top heavy with “big name” individuals and “big” organizations. This may be true, but it was not at all obvious to us. It was one of the most open, democratic, mass gatherings we have experienced.

Everything went fairly smoothly, except for the odd hiccup here and there. But this was not the fault of the organizers. At one point, on the day before the opening of the ESF, at Caxton Hall in Red Lion Square in the West End, where thousands of people lined up in the pouring rain to pick up their credentials, the police smashed the literature tables of some of the political groups, and in one case arrested the national organizer of the International Socialists for apparently violating a by-law about literature tables on the pavement. On another occasion, a large rally—attended by over two thousand people—organized by the Stop the War Coalition (STWC), was virtually hijacked, in a military style operation by some far-left sects (according to Alex Callinicos of the SWP), along with Middle Eastern exiles, objecting to the presence of a representative of the Iraqi trade unions on the platform. They shouted down the chairperson, Lindsey German, a leader of the STWC, and crowded in front of the platform, refusing to allow the meeting to proceed, over the objections of the audience, who several times voted in its vast majority to hear the speakers. The meeting was finally forced to adjourn.

This political vandalism was in evidence at a mass rally to open the London ESF, when several hundred people rushed the platform to prevent Ken Livingstone from speaking, claiming he had “hi-jacked” the event. It also

could be seen at the mass anti-war mobilization in Trafalgar Square at the conclusion of the ESF, when groups of people again tried to rush the speaker-stand and were only held back by a line of marshals with linked arms.

For us, these disturbing examples, exhibited a form of authoritarianism and intolerance that runs counter to the democratic practices of the global justice movement where freedom to hear alternate ideas is highly prized. But over all, the overwhelming majority of people was respectful of different views and listened carefully to speakers. By and large things went smoothly, and from what we could see, it was in no way an “establishment” event. There were very few members of parliament or representatives of the political elites on the event’s platforms.

On opening day, at first appearance, the scene at the Alexandra Palace looked chaotic. Outside the main buildings, many people were distributing and selling literature. Special editions of socialist newspapers had been published for the occasion. The ground was littered with discarded paper; as one wit said, if you were to take each piece of paper handed to you, at the end of the day, you would be carrying your body-weight in paper. Inside, masses of people, each with programme in hand, searched for the location of the panel they wished to attend. In the main hall, large areas had been arranged, with seating for five or six hundred people, each curtained off for panels which lasted a couple of hours and were scheduled continuously throughout the day. Trade-union banners hung everywhere. Many young people lay on the floor sleeping in out-of-the-way places and some sat crossed-legged in small groups, in what looked like intense discussions.

It was a festival of political ideas and

visions. At its broadest level, it was overwhelmingly anti-capitalist, against the war in Iraq and overwhelmingly pro-Palestinian. These themes pushed their way to the surface in virtually every discussion. At another level, most of the social-movement campaigns that are underway all over Europe around such issues as health care, civil rights, about the environment and ecology, about discrimination, against the ultra-right and in support of asylum-seekers, were well represented there. Over 1500 people attended a boisterous meeting which expressed opposition to the anti-immigration policies of the Blair government and the French government’s banning of the head scarf (“hijab”) in schools. It appeared that anyone in Europe who was involved in any struggle to change the status quo had come to London to renew contact with like-minded activists to discuss tactics and share experiences.

It was an arena where revolutionary socialists also came together. For example, we attended a packed meeting at Birkbeck College where the Socialist Workers’ Party’s Chris Bambery and the Revolutionary Communist League of France’s Alain Krivine, debated the political context in Europe and the way forward for the anti-war movement, including the issue of “the scarf” in France. It seemed to us that differences in the left have sharpened since Florence, a time when there was lots of discussion about the “recomposition” and “regroupment” of the European left.

It was impossible to attend all the meetings which interested us. One afternoon, we caught the tail end of large meeting where Perry Anderson and Peter Gowan of *New Left Review* spoke and where Anderson made a very powerful criticism of the United Nations and its role as an →

instrument of American imperial power. This meeting overlapped another stimulating discussion with John Holloway, author of the recent book, "Change the World Without Taking Power", Phil Hearse of *Socialist Resistance*, Hilary Wainwright of *Red Pepper* and Fausto Bertinotti of the Refounded Communist Party of Italy, about strategies for social change and which turned out to be a rigorous examination of Holloway's advice to young activists to turn their backs on the issue of state power. We had the impression that Holloway had lost the argument, but several hundred in the

audience of around 600, many of them young activists from Italy, obviously disagreed with us, as could be heard in their applause for Holloway.

The ESF movement has allowed the various socialist groups to speak to a mass audience of the most socially conscious layer of today's generation of young activists. It has been the location for intense discussion about some of the profound problems that confront our society, with many questioning the ability of the capitalist system to solve the world's social and environmental crises. Despite predictions by its critics – on the right and

the left – that this movement would be unable to sustain itself and would soon peter out because of its inability to effect "real" social change, it always seems to reinvent itself and challenge its detractors' most gloomy predictions. In its own way, this movement seems to be attempting to transcend the political reformism of the hitherto traditional mass working class based parties of social democracy and Stalinism.

R

The next ESF will be in Athens, Greece in the Spring of 2006.

The Declaration of the Assembly of Social Movements

The World Social Forum prohibits regional forums such as the European Social Forum from issuing statements or calls for action. To get around this problem, the various organizations which made up the European Social Forum, constituted themselves as "the Assembly of the Social Movements". This body made the following decisions:

To support the call from environmental organisations for action on climate change in 2005;

To mobilize for the G8 summit in Scotland in July, 2005;

To support the international day of mobilization against violence against women on November, 25th, and its European initiative;

To support the mobilization to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8th;

To support the European initiative on May 27th and 28th in Marseilles proposed by the World March for Women;

To propose a day of action on April 2nd, 2005, against racism, for freedom of movement and the right to stay (for asylum seekers and refugees);

To support the national mobilization of the Italian movement on October 30th, to mark the signing of the European Constitutional Treaty;

To support the mobilization in Barcelona in January 2005 against the summit of Zapatero, Chirac and Schroeder on the European Constitution;

And finally...."20th March, 2005, marks the second anniversary of the start of the war against Iraq. On the 22nd and 23rd of March, the European Council meets in Brussels. We call for national mobilizations in all European countries. We call for a central demonstration in Brussels on the 19th of March against war, racism and against a neoliberal Europe, against privatization, against the Bolkesteijn project and against attacks on working time; for a Europe of rights and solidarity between the peoples. We call on the social movements and the European trade union movements to take to the streets on that day".

Does the Toronto Social Forum represent an alternative for organizing?

Carlos Torres

The Toronto Social Forum (TSF) was created as a local mirror of the WSF; that has been its intention, at least. Created after some attempts promoted by the Centre for Social Justice for generating a dynamic in line with the WSF in Toronto failed, the idea for the TSF developed during the 2002 Summer Social Justice retreat. By the end of that year the TSF was up and running with the WSF as an inspiration and the strong commitment of a hand-full of Toronto activists and organizers, some with organizational labels and others without.

The newness of the TSF generated the conditions to organize several events in Metro Toronto where thousands of people congregated for its debut. During the first year the TSF was organized following a process of open assemblies on which basis a Coordinating Committee was selected to 'run' the TSF in correspondence with the principles of the WSF. The process helped to organize several massive events with the participation of people from beyond Toronto, including a delegation from Quebec.

In January 2003 the TSF coordinated the event "From Toronto to Porto Alegre: Alternatives to Corporate-led Globalization". This public gathering was conceived as a small scale Social Forum in preparation for the 2003 WSF. Over 500 people attended. After the Forum in Porto Alegre Forum, the TSF organized a

WSF 'report back' at the OISE Auditorium, again attracting hundreds of people.

A weekend-long Toronto Social Forum took place in March 2003, attracting more than 1000 people to the Artists Against the Empire evening. More than 1500 people attended the weekend panels and self organized workshops, cultural events and social gatherings. In the spring 2003 the TSF assessed the process and elected a new Coordinating Committee and defined the priorities for the 2003-04 term. Among others, the TSF prioritized building relationships with marginalized groups, communities of people-of-colour, and reasserted its international/global profile. The aim of creating political and cultural spaces for social organizations and movements to converge in the TSF was also maintained as one of the major priorities.

The WSF 2004 in Mumbai, India, called on the TSF to take a new path by organizing process with activists of South Asian origin; the TSF was reaching out beyond the 'usual suspects'. The other major priority of the TSF was to create new links with aboriginal organizers in the city and activities were organized to explore the possibilities of sharing experiences between South Asians communities and Canadian aboriginal groups in Toronto. In January 2004, the event "Strangers at Home: Experiences of

South Asians and aboriginal people in Canada" was presented as a pre-World Social Forum event, with more than 400 in attendance. The 2004 WSF report back "From Mumbai to Toronto" brought together almost 300 people.

The Toronto Social Forum allows for a different kind of participation combining active organizers and new, fresh members of the activist community. It embraces the WSF principles in terms of self-organizing, pluralism and participation. Moreover, it also manages to reach out to communities distanced from 'mainstream activism'. The aim is to build knowledge and relationships among social movements, NGOs and social organizations at large in Toronto, Canada, Quebec and abroad.

As the WSF does, the TSF faces many challenges to overcoming constraints imposed by neoliberal globalization. The question is how to bring to the local communities the big picture that the WSF represents. The TSF has contributed greatly to motivating diverse communities to work together and has also developed a new political culture and a space in which there is room for everyone (as the Zapatistas put it). The task is now to use the political capital of the TSF to maintain the space and practices that are at the root of the assertion that another world is possible. **R**





Richard Roman

Edur Velasco Arregui, former secretary-general of SITUAM (Sindicato Independiente de los Trabajadores de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana) in Mexico City, trade union activist and Economics professor, staged a one-month hunger strike, to protest against starvation wages in Mexico and the complicity of the officialist unions in Mexico's low wage policy. The decision to hold a hunger strike and supporting *plantón* (protest encampment) was taken by the Strike Committee of SITUAM and supported by dissident currents in other unions. The Strike Committee is composed of 400 delegates, one for every 12 workers, and is the highest decision-making body of the union during periods of a possible strike. SITUAM is an exceptionally democratic and combative union that is composed of all the employees of the UAM, blue-collar, white-collar and academic. Both SITUAM and Edur played key roles in the founding of the Intersindical (Inter-union organizing committee) in 1996, a previous attempt to bring together democratic unions and dissident union currents.

Edur and the union hoped that a dramatic act of personal sacrifice and risk would trigger a significant response among workers, workers who've seen the purchasing power of the minimum wage decline by 72.9% between 1988 and 2004, and, according to union estimates, by 20% in the last 18 months. Edur held his solo hunger strike outside the National Commission for Minimum Wages of Mexico for thirty days, starting on December 13 to January 12. His body

began to show signs of potentially serious problems in the first days of January and he was hospitalized on January 9, though he continued to refuse to eat until the Strike committee called off the protest on January 12.

The immediate target of the hunger strike and *plantón* was the measly increase of the minimum wage granted by the National Commission for Minimum Wages, an increase of 1.6 pesos daily (14 cents US or 18 cents Canadian). This commission was set up to implement one aspect of Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917. Article 123 declares that the minimum wage should be adequate to support a family. The Commission determines changes in the minimum wage on an annual basis, though in periods of high inflation, it has done so more frequently. The goal of maintaining purchasing power by including past inflation in the calculations was replaced by the goal of increasing Mexico's competitive position. Predicted inflation became the new formal criteria for increases in the minimum wage. By consistently underestimating future inflation, the government engineered the tremendous fall in the real minimum wage.

Approximately, one million workers in the formal sector receive the minimum wage of \$4 daily, according to government statistics. The vast numbers of workers in the informal sector, estimated to be over 20 million or approximately 50% of the labour force, receive even less. The minimum wage forms the basis for the calculation of other wages, so that the wage may be set at 2, 3, 4 minimum wages and

changes in the minimum wage generally form a ceiling for wage negotiations. The National Commission for Minimum Wages is composed of 21 members, 10 from unions, 10 from business and one from government. The vote for the insulting increase in the minimum wage for this year was 20-1. Nine of the ten union representatives voted with business for this meaningless increase in the minimum wage. Only one union, the mineworkers, broke ranks and voted against the paltry increase.

The 10 labour representatives are chosen by the heads of the official, undemocratic unions affiliated with the CT (Congreso de Trabajo). These unions have, for the most part of the last century, been hybrid institutions combining characteristics of state institutions with those of authoritarian unions. Though the party that ruled Mexico for 70 years lost control of the presidency in 2000, the neoliberal policies of the previous 20 years continued. The links of these officialist unions to the state remained very strong and mutual. The state continued to support the authoritarian union leaders and these leaders continued to acquiesce to the attacks on the working class. They remain an important pillar of control over the workers.

The hunger strike brought significant attention to the issue of poverty wages in Mexico and the undemocratic manner in which changes to the minimum wage are determined. There were over 40 articles in national papers and many radio stories and interviews. Both the elected assembly of the DF (Distrito Federal—federal district

of Mexico City) and its center-left mayor, Andrés López Obrador, issued an endorsement of both the hunger strike and the demand for an emergency across the board wage increase.

The most important outcome of the hunger strike, to date, has been the beginning of a campaign demanding an emergency across the board wage increase and a democratic process of selecting the representatives to the National Commission for Minimum Wages. The national mineworkers' union (80,000 members) joined with SITUAM and dissident currents in the telephone workers, social security workers and some industrial unions (Ford and Chrysler) to sponsor a rally near the hunger strike at which it was decided to launch a campaign around these demands.

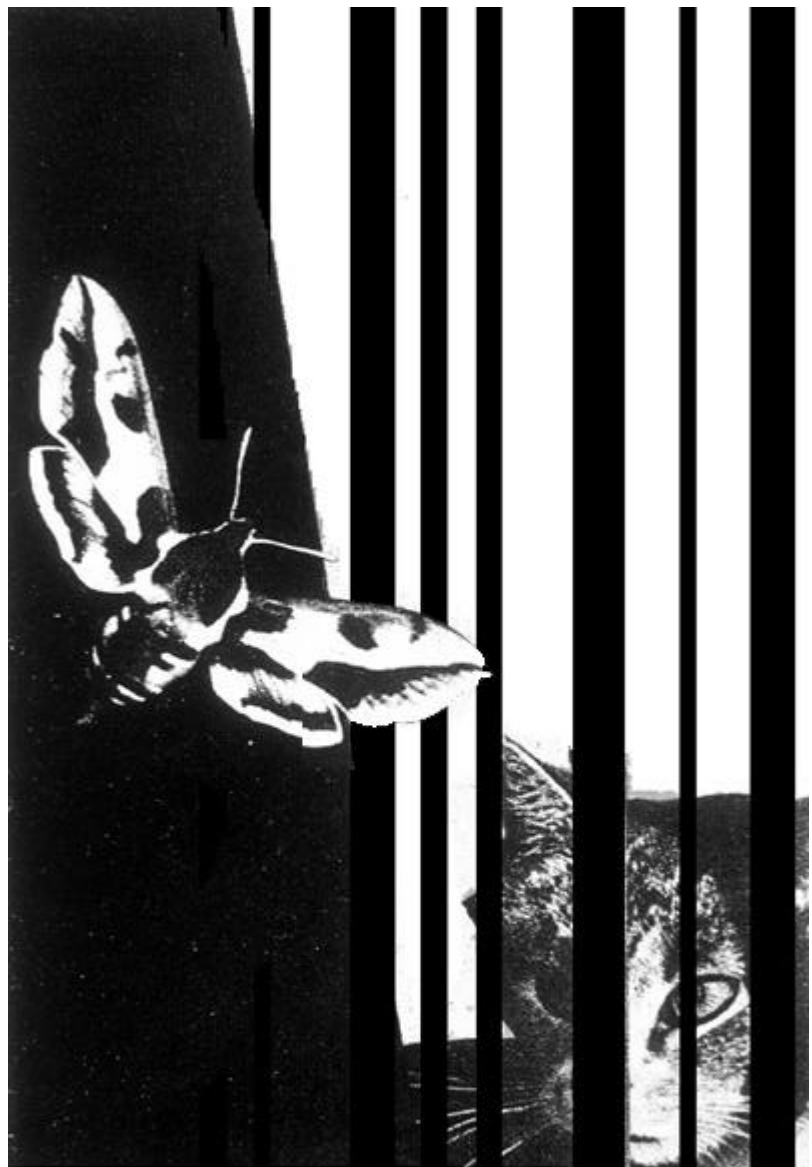
Union membership in Mexico, under steady decline in the last two decades, has fallen to about 12% of the labour force. Other than the mineworkers and SITUAM, there has not been a public reaction from unions to the hunger strike. The officialist unions, which voted for the worthless wage increase, are themselves a target of the protest. Some non-officialist unions disagree with the goal of democratizing the workers' representation on the minimum wage commission; they want to abolish it completely and move the determination of minimum wages to the national Congress. Some are too consumed with defensive struggles. And there is a large element of fear and fatalism about challenging the core element of Mexico's export oriented development strategy – cheap labour. In fact, the new phase of the assault on the working class entails the argument that Mexican wages and benefits are too high! The Chinese menace is emphasized these days in managerial and government rhetoric to deepen this fatalism.

The 20-year neoliberal assault on the Mexican working class continues unabated and has become intertwined with the transformation from the old authoritarian system to one of electoral alternation. The old quasi-corporatist, officialist unions (CT/

CTM), the dissident, neo-corporatist unions and democratic union currents are all engaged in a battle over the direction of the workers' movement. The perspective represented by Edur and SITUAM views the minimum wage demands as a way of beginning to build a class-wide struggle of resistance from below that includes both organized workers and the vast majority of the working class, which lack unions.

Though his body is still very weak, Edur's spirits are high. He and his compañeros from the union movement have tried to plant a seed of re-

sistance in a field of despair and discontent. They've created new links between themselves and the many workers who visited the *plantón* over the month. They have succeeded in making poverty wages, at least for the moment, a public issue rather than an assumed fact of life. After two days in the hospital, Edur has been undergoing a slow recovery at home. Now, as he recuperates, his sisters and brothers in the labour movement are working to turn this protest into an ongoing organized struggle for dignity and a living wage. R



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Colombia: US Satellite States and the Loss of Democracy

nchamah miller and Amparo Torres

What does sovereign democracy entail? Democracy in one way or another entails political rights for all citizens and residents of a given country; and sovereignty requires that these political rights are protected within each country through an independent legal framework (Constitutions/Laws) which provide the basis for proclaiming countries as sovereign states. In other words, political democracy inures on a state to exert its sovereignty on behalf of its citizens, but also very importantly that it respect the sovereignty of other states. We argue that these principles do not exist independent of the other. Their amalgam reflects the ties between a State and its citizen's entitlement to sovereign democracy. In what follows we explain what occurs when sovereign democracy is deliberately undermined and distorted. Our case in point is Colombia.

The loss of democratic sovereignty is the framework for the creation of political zombies, that is: living in a country where there is no expectation of either exerting political freedom or protection of this freedom under the law. Nothing demonstrates the loss of sovereign democracy in Colombia more than the actions of the current regime of puppet-president Uribe. In the last 50 years Colombia has been a country where political dissidence has unavoidably taken two expressions: one active through armed struggle against the erosion of political rights and the other "uneasy living," in which many compromises are made at an individual level if only to remain within the sphere of political subsistence.

For the sake of brevity we will only address active political dissidence and, as a case in point, refer to the acceleration of a new process imposed by America's President Bush during a recent visit to Colombia and readily acquiesced by Uribe. This agreement not only undermines sovereign democracy in Colombia, but far worse, it negates political freedom. We argue that it is not a coincidence that two months after the visit of Bush to Colombia the Government of Uribe kidnapped Colombian citizens residing in neigh-



bouring countries with the purpose of extraditing them to the US. One case occurred in Ecuador, involving Simon Trinidad. The other took place in Venezuela, involving Rodrigo Granada.

President Chavez broke diplomatic relations with Colombia in protest at this blatant attack on Venezuela's sovereignty. The next few weeks should prove to be very interesting since what is at stake now are Latin American trade agreements, the type of neo-liberal agreements that Chavez opposes.

We will address the case of Simon Trinidad and include an analysis of the situation in Venezuela insofar as it involves official statements by

the Government of Colombia with respect to its incursions into sovereign territory of neighbouring states, in this case Ecuador and Venezuela.

Simon Trinidad is the "battle name" for a man born within the elite moneyed class of Colombia; he has a doctoral degree in Economics from Harvard University. In the 1980s he joined the forces for armed struggle in Colombia because of the murder of 5,000 members of the political party Union Patriótica for no other reason than that of belonging to a legally constituted political party, albeit of the opposition. In other words, political choice can hardly be described as existing when it is either silenced by paramilitary death squads or the auto-censure of all political views in order not to be killed. In the last two decades Trinidad dedicated his efforts to aiding those in armed struggle, but early in 2004, due to health reasons,

he travelled to Ecuador seeking medical help. While in Ecuador, personnel of the Colombian armed forces kidnapped Trinidad, repatriated him to Colombia, and placed Trinidad incommunicado in army barracks (an indication that this was a political prisoner). That Ecuador never protested this blatant act against its national sovereignty only signifies its collusion with the Colombian government and the US.

All previous presidents of Colombia, despite their close ties to the US, have always resisted the extradition of its citizens to the US for criminal offences; yet Uribe under the guise of the "War on Drugs" readily extra-

dited persons accused of drug trafficking on US soil. In other words, Uribe established a legal mechanism to extradite Colombian citizens to the US. While the pretext is that those persons committed criminal offences, the real target as we will demonstrate, is its political opponents. The Colombia government, for lack of a better strategy, resorted to accusing those involved in the armed struggle as active and affluent narcotrafficking drug lords. Their lack of logic is astounding considering the hardships and suffering of those in armed struggle, whose unsophisticated weaponry and small villages only indicate dedication to a political cause, and not the affluent lifestyle pursued by those in government and the narco-traffic world.

In December of 2004, Colombia extradited Simon Trinidad to the US; there is no response to a habeas corpus by his legal counsel in Colombia, and there are no clear charges. Preliminary allegations place him in the US, when in fact at that time he was one of the main negotiators for the peace process in Colombia during the government of Pastrana. He is incommunicado, at an undisclosed location, and his legal counsel appointed by the US government does not respond to enquiries of the whereabouts of this client.

Thus, a mechanism to bring drug smugglers under the American justice system turns into a political weapon that perpetuates the grotesque task which commenced with the decimation of political dissidents in Colombia. It follows that safe havens for Colombian political dissidents no longer exist. Obviously, the Colombian justice system does not provide a legal framework to protect political rights. Not by ignoring habeas corpus and extraditing citizens whose charges have not been clearly stated or made public. Simon Trinidad's case shames the justice system of Colombia in that it cooperated and obeyed with extradition orders (a reminder of colonial rule), thus demonstrating that the Colombian legal system is but a satellite mechanism at the service of

US military capitalism.

For Canadians this may seem just another South American nightmare, but we argue that this process is a matter of planned logistics. Far from being just another South American morass, this and other similar events illustrate the nascent fascist repression that has taken the guise of war on terrorism or war on drugs. The political structure that smashes democratic sovereignty is fascism. The mechanism of extradition is not a fascist one per se. However, when the processes that lead to extradition involve ignoring political and legal rights, then, at that point, such an arbitrary use of authority con-

with the agreements between Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia. The document further reveals that all actions taken had the purpose to expedite the war on terrorism or on drugs, thus legitimating and validating any incursions by the Colombian government (read US) into foreign national territories. One could almost have a glimmer of hope because the document is drenched with the rhetoric appealing to social justice and development of the people. But given Colombia's dismal record and blind eye to political assassinations and unofficially sanctioned parallel grotesque paramilitary repression, it is hard to give credence to any



stitutes the birthing of neo-fascism.

The Colombian government's litany, raised in defence of its actions, states that all procedures of extradition were "coordinated" with the proper authorities in order to proceed via established legal norms and procedures: what is far from clear is what the word "coordination" means in this context. The Venezuelan government never received a request for the extradition of Granada. Even more provoking is Uribe's boast that his government was informed that the "kidnapping" would take place. Now it is obvious that "coordination" means none other than coordination and submission to US authority and deliberate non compliance

calls for social justice.

In Venezuela, massive protests against the kidnapping of Rodrigo Granada took place. Venezuelans perceived this incursion as Colombian collusion with the US aimed at destabilizing the current government and diminishing President Hugo Chavez's popularity. Few people in Colombia dared demonstrate against the loss of democratic sovereignty - personified in the extradition of Simon Trinidad. Campaigns have started in Australia, Canada and the US, not only to protest against this new form of legal fascism, but also to enquire into the whereabouts of one of Colombia's most important political activists. **R**



Sport has always been a matter of deep social significance. In contemporary society there are few individuals who do not, directly or indirectly, encounter sport in their daily lives. Some may be actively involved as participants in sporting activity; others as spectators at sporting events or via the mass media; and others as volunteer coaches, referees, or executive members of a sporting organization. There is also a segment of the population that is not particularly interested in sport. But sport is also inevitable: through the sports news, sporting conversation in family or work settings, or through the enthusiasm often pouring out into the streets over major events such as the World Cup of Soccer, the Olympic Games, the World Cup of Cricket, the Stanley Cup Playoffs and so forth.

Sport has some influence on the lives of almost everyone throughout the world. Yet, in many socialist circles, there exists a certain 'haughty' view towards sports as unimportant to political and social analysis. Professional sport is often just seen as another diversionary tactic of the capitalist bosses doping workers to forget the class struggle – 'an opiate of the masses'. Yet, it is an important component of people's daily lives and culture, and we would be remiss not to try to gain a deeper understanding of its culture and actual production.

Take the current NHL lockout for example. Watching hockey in Canada in arenas or on television is a leisure-time activity for an

overwhelming number of Canadians. During the National Hockey League (NHL) playoffs, hockey functions as almost a religion, an inextricable part of the national culture, 'the game of our lives.' Hockey has a profound influence on the lives of many Canadians. It has also become a multi-million dollar industry in which highly-trained, highly-paid athletes chase a puck around a highly-valued development site. Hockey was once primarily an object of individual patronage whose main source of revenue was gate receipts; hockey is now a part of corporate strategies of capital accumulation and financial speculation.

These new corporate strategies are at the heart of the current lockout and labour dispute shutting the current season down. The owners feel that they can crack the NHL Players Association (NHLPA). But despite the flood of players overseas to the Russian, Swiss, Swedish and Finnish leagues, not a single player has yet to defect. Not exactly class-consciousness as we think of it, but nevertheless a certain solidarity between the players (who work for a living regardless of how much money they make).

There is a larger perspective to the NHLPA's response to being locked out by the owners' efforts to impose a salary cap. By an owners' combination, owners of the NHL have historically been able to enforce the most arbitrary of measures and the players have had to either submit or get out of a profession. Unquestionably, professional hockey players are not hurting fi-

nancially. But they are also illustrating a certain kind of 'class' or 'player' consciousness against the latest round of arbitrary management measures.

Unfortunately, this has not trickled down to the average fan, who cannot afford to buy a ticket to watch his or her favourite team. Fans have become 'disconnected' from the economic institutions of hockey, and professional sport in general. This is due to an unprecedented phase of commercialization of public and sporting spaces in the last twenty years. Professional sport has become unaffordable and distant. It reeks of greed. Sporting politics glorify not the drama of athletic competition, but a drunken, gambling, pugnacious masculinity epitomized by sports-talk television and radio.

Sports media has also been decidedly with management. In the NHL labour dispute, popular media — in its attempts to bring back the goose who lays its golden eggs — has labelled locked out players ingrates violating public trust, men without principles, men who would be struggling at a 'regular job'. The average irate fan suppresses the important fact that although professional hockey players have individual market power, they do not control the enterprises responsible for the commercialization that has overwhelmed hockey. Ultimate control of the NHL and its move to move mass commercialization rests in the hands of corporate owners, managers of sports franchises and the media outlets whose own revenues are depend

ent upon the game.

Professional hockey has been a business for some time. Professional hockey is produced foremost now as a commodity. There is, however, a prevalent notion that sport is unique, and set apart from ordinary commodities like automobiles or cell phones. As hockey has increasingly become commercialized, any substantive debate about 'the game', or the role of sport within the community, has been deflected by a wide variety of frustrations about the business of sports. The commercialization of hockey has enriched not only athletes, but also owners, agents and promoters as well. Fans and media commentators recognize and resent the absurd salaries of many players, but tune out the corporate owners and profits. For them it is the wheeling and dealing of players and general managers that have profaned the sanctity of hockey. But sports are now a big part of corporate entertainment conglomerates driven by profits and share prices.

What seems to be at issue for the (mainly male) fans is a final assault on the romantic ideal of sport, something apart from the everyday exchanges of the market. This is the 'commodity fetishism' of the relationship between things replacing human relations that Marx saw in the logic of capital and profit. Rarely has this critique of major league sport surfaced as a public criticism. Popular criticism of the sports industry is almost never social. It rarely encompasses a broader assessment of current patterns of economic development and the corporate and state policies that sustain them.

Instead, critical reflections are more likely to be draped in nostalgia, and located in the politics of individualized consumer revolt. Today's apparent greed and corruption are contrasted to the 'good old days,' a mythical time when owners were sports people first and

entrepreneurs second, when professional franchises were anchored in their home communities, and players were simply happy just to play the game. Such popular conceptions of the 'good old days' typically celebrate the major leagues and their 'traditions.' These were exactly the themes of Ken Dryden's celebrated TV series and book on hockey; it is the visual representation in Ken Danby's famous hockey paintings; and it is the nostalgia for the Toronto Maple Leafs that colour many a conversation in Ontario.

But the popular construction of tradition here tends to be highly selective. The racial segregation of baseball and the pandering to corporate interests in hockey during the Canada Cup series are left out. These highly-tinted images usually tell us little about the social and economic pressures that permitted development of sports cartels and the role of sports in the constitution of particular national and popular cultures. And they tell us nothing about the organization of professional sports within capitalism, and the way sports has itself come to reflect the social and economic divisions of neoliberalism.

Professional hockey players can be criticized for many failings, including lust for ever higher salaries. But in a society dominated by capitalist economics, it seems churlish to chide them because they accept a salary for the randomness of their athletic ability. The structure of the sports industry also warrants critical examination. Sports markets are monopolistic. Governments permit leagues and professional sports teams to operate outside the anti-trust statutes. They accord professional sports teams excessive tax breaks; massively subsidize stadium construction; and allow significant tax write-offs of tickets by corporate purchasers. Sports fans who think professional sports like hockey have become contaminated can press govern-

ments to apply fully and rigorously anti-trust and competition statutes and challenge subsidies to all professional sports.

A more radical proposition would be to remove profit from sport altogether. Since sport is a fundamental part of culture, and communities contribute excessively to the development of the athletes and facilities that pro-leagues exploit, sport should be the common property of the community. Organizations structured along non-profit and revenue sharing lines would go a long way to repatriate and reinvigorate sports at all levels, and between genders. Government policies of building and creating public sporting facilities around the country would revive physical education and personal well-being.

The NHL lockout of the players over the winter of 2004-5 opens a dialogue about arbitrary management in relation to salaried players. It should not stop there. The lockout also tells us a great deal about neoliberalism, corporations, and the commercialization of sport at public expense if we care to probe a little deeper. Indeed, sport is not a bad place to start thinking about alternatives to capitalism with our workmates and neighbours. **R**

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Anti-Corporate Aesthetics and *The Corporate World*

Tanner Mirrlees

The anti-corporate ethos that characterized much of the anti-globalization movement in the latter part of the 1990s has a history; it can be traced back to the widespread public criticism of corporate power that emerged in tandem with industrial capitalism. The humanization of corporations by the legal apparatuses of national states in the late 19th century did not sit very well with the public. Most people recognized that corporations—despite the efforts of their spin-doctors—to create a ‘corporate soul’—were not flesh and blood humans. Cognizant were people of the fact that corporations were concentrated amalgamations of capital (financial, technological, human), owned by a minority of self-interested productive and finance capitalists that, through these organizations, optimized their extraction of wealth from working people. Thus, while corporations were legitimated as natural humans by the law, corporations lacked a comparable public legitimacy and as result, were constantly burdened with the need to manage public criticism. Certainly, the public legitimacy of corporations and the corporate control of mass consciousness have never been total—not one hundred years ago and certainly not today.

The anti-corporate ethos that re-emerged in the mid to late 1990s to challenge corporate power attested the continuity of the corporation’s ongoing crisis of public legitimacy. The protests against the IMF, the World Bank, and global corporations at the “Battle of Seattle” debunked the utopian myths of corporate-led neo-liberal ‘globalization.’ And texts that were critical of corporate power found many sympathetic readers. David Korten’s *When Corporations Rule the World* stirred up liberal-left anxieties in the US, Murry

Dobbin’s *The Myth of the Good Corporate Citizen* debunked notions of corporate benevolence, and Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* raged at the fetishistic spectacle of brand logos.

By the end of the of the 20th century and the dawn of the 21st, urban culture jams, creative street protests, *Adbusters*, and websites (from left to right) marked the re-vitalization and popularization of an attitude and activism that criticized corporate power. But criticism of corporate power—in the content of many texts and enacted on many streets—was, in many instances, unable to move beyond a desire to uphold the political ideals of liberalism—ideals that were so often undermined or contradicted by the workings of capitalism. Despite the political limits of much anti-corporate dissent, genuine public criticism of corporate power persists. Today, traces of this anti-corporate ethos are scattered across the present as a belated response to and reminder of a political opportunity that was ‘built from below’ and then burned by the imperial state in the post-9/11 flames.

Traces of an anti-corporate ethos continue to circulate in many recent popular films. Mark Achbar and Bart Simpson’s *The Corporation*, the highest grossing independent film in Canada since the late 1960s, argues that corporations exhibit the behavioural tendencies of psychopaths. In *Super Size Me*, the protagonist (Morgan Spurlock) pollutes his mind and body with the excessive consumption of McDonalds fare in order to prove that McDonalds Corporation, despite the claims of its and advertising executives, promotes unhealthy lifestyles. *The Manchurian Candidate*, once known as a ‘conspiracy theory’

narrative, found a large audience to its most recent Hollywood adaptation; in this film, a global corporation hijacks the American government by programming a presidential candidate to do its economic bidding (the state-capital connection, allegorized in the film, may recalls a Marxian adage: ‘The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie’). In a hugely successful Playstation 2 video game called *State of Emergency*, gamers play as anarchist-activist-protagonists that wage a revolutionary struggle to destroy a global corporation.

This contradictory postmodern context, wherein a politically belated anti-corporate ethos is turned into entertaining objects of public entertainment and enjoyment, is the historical condition of possibility for the following critical reading of *The Corporate World* (showing between January 12 and February 27, 2005), a multi-media exhibit launched by the Toronto free gallery (located at 660 Queen Street East, Toronto). *The Corporate World* is advertised by its organizers as ‘a tradeshow of the best & worst versions of a corporation.’ Composed of eleven installations and exhibits, *The Corporate World* parodies various facets of the ‘corporate world’ in a number of creative and critical responses to corporate culture. A brief overview of some of *The Corporate World*’s highlights follow.

Kevin Temple’s “The Allied Reassurance Group” critiques of the insurance industry’s use of fear to maximize profits (for every new anxiety or risk the insurance industry constructs, a new consumable insurance policy and site of accumulation is brought into existence) only to offer

disgruntled consumers a new and highly profitable ‘alternative to the pitfalls of insurance’: a new tele-communications service — ‘a personal *re-assurance* policy’! Victoria Stanton debunks notions that a bank’s distribution of loans to starving artists is a sign of their kindness and interest in the arts with the “Bank of Victoria.” Stanton’s ‘Bank of Victoria’ ironically purports to ‘go beyond banking’ by indiscriminately distributing high-interest loans to starving artists, but only to exacerbate their indebtedness.

The “City Beautification Ensemble” draws attention to how the discourse of urban beautification, when instrumentalized by corporations, accelerates the privatization of public space and in turn, produces a new service-based mode by which companies can accumulate wealth from the transformation of sidewalks, bike racks, and street corners into exchange-values. “The Commons,” by Sarah Chu, Charlene Lau, and Jillian Locke, attempts to reveal how ‘the commons’ is a rhetorical tool that is repeatedly used by both the artistic and corporate community to ag-

grandize their moral contribution to society (in order to secure investment or funding); for the producers of this installation, whose tongue-in-cheek motto reads ‘we can help you make today the tomorrow you dreamed of yesterday’, the ideal of ‘the commons’ is invoked to ‘promise everything and deliver nothing.’ Frank de Francesco’s “The Confessor” perhaps comments on the commercialization, secularization and individualization of what used to be collective religious practice; ‘The Confessor’ invites gal-

lery consumers ‘relieve and be themselves’ within a wall-mounted confessional booth that fits only one person’s head — the body no longer matters.

A few of *The Corporate World*’s pieces critique the devastating effects (real and potential) of American neo-conservative ideology and military and economic imperialism. Illona Staples “Securnomor” recalls the disintegration of civil liberties with the American state’s pre-emptive security apparatus, the expanding technologies surveillance, the emergent culture of fear, and the internalization of this panoptic society of control by so many citi-

future generations of American children for war in the Middle East, to re-develop America’s nuclear capabilities and open more nuclear waste storage facilities, to utilize global warming as a weapon in American trade wars, to normalize rigid ‘moral’ adherence to Christian family values, especially abortion, and to naturalize the existence of poverty and tax breaks for the ruling elite).

Typical of postmodern art forms, *The Corporate World* enacts the collapse of high and low culture distinctions by transforming the language, imagery, and style of corporate PR and

advertising — once the object of so much academic ridicule and hostile aesthetic value judgements — into legitimate art. But unlike Warhol’s expensive reproductions of pop art, which heralded the de-differentiation of modernism’s aesthetic hierarchies by re-making commercial art into a fetish that was uncritically consumed and praised by the cultural intelligentsia, *The Corporate World* simulates corporate culture, not to celebrate and affirm its triumph, but to elicit a *critical* re-



City Beautification Ensemble

zens that are (as this exhibit’s brochure emphasizes) “encouraged to serve their community by seeking out and anticipating potential threats to the physical and psychological safety of their friends, family, and neighbours, as well as to public and private property.” “The Yes Men” (which refers to President George W. Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney) is a series of simulated Republican Party brochures that asks audiences to “Take the USA Patriot” pledge” (which involves giving the state written consent to institutionalize the USA Patriot Act, to prepare

response from its diverse audiences. By de-familiarizing and estranging bits and pieces of corporate and consumer culture (and at times, fragments of neo-liberal and neo-conservative ‘common sense’) *The Corporate World* attempts to reveal the contradictions of everyday life that such ideological distortions conceal or normalize. The formal qualities of *The Corporate World* are thus different from conventional postmodern art. In many of the works, postmodernism’s de-differentiation of high and low culture meets modernism’s desire to produce a critical →

viewing audience

The political effects and implications of *The Corporate World*, however, are contradictory. Although *The Corporate World* effectively reflects the persistence of public criticism and anxiety about corporate power in the world today, it does not attempt to change or shape the world. It does not proscribe imaginary liberal resolutions to the problems it highlights and refuses to tentatively imagine socialist alternatives to the capitalist system it satirically bemoans. Furthermore, the critical political subject that is potentially inspired by the show's parody of how corporate PR and advertising mask and distort a world that is rife with contradiction, anxiety and conflict risks being neutralized or subsumed by what Peter Sloterdijk calls 'cynical reason': a postmodern ideology that requires a brief explanation. Sloterdijk argues that Marx's classical conception of ideology as mystification or false consciousness, which presumed that people could not apprehend the ruling class interests of their world (and the distortions and falsities which legitimized or masked them), fails to appreciate the 'cynical reason' that pervades the consciousness of the cultural elite in postmodern times. For Sloterdijk, the cultural elite understand how the capitalist system works. They are self-reflexively critical and cognizant of the system's ruling class interests, contradictions, and ideological distortions. Sadly, the cultured elites cynically accept these conditions (in all of their ideological falsity and distortion) rather than struggling to change them.

The Corporate World risks facilitating and reproducing this postmodern ideology of cynical reason; it recognizes that the corporate world is exploitative and hypocritical, is riddled with distortions that thrive on human anxiety, fear, anomie, and insecurity, and is served by an imperial security state. But the show's parodies of the many ideological distortions of the corporate world, and its critical

recognition and revelation of the dire realities which the corporate world's ideological distortions conceal, are not guided by a desire to move beyond the system which produces and reproduces these ideological distortions. At worst, *The Corporate World* risks turning a reflection of the realities so often concealed by capitalism's ideological masks into a new source of cynical consumerist pleasure.

"Sell All Your Body Time Space," an installation by Cary Pepperminy and Bill Spornitz flirts with this cynical potential. The piece moves beyond the techniques of parody into the sphere of brutal realism. The motto of this mock corporation states: 'through our bold and painstakingly honest approach to the commodification of every conceivable aspect of the human living experience, we will further evolve a secure, dependable, unwavering system of strict



From The Yes Men's "RNC Phrasebook for Tour Guides"

global capitalism". This installation facilitates (posing as CEOs and members of the company's managerial classes) invite gallery visitors to performatively sell themselves to the corporation, to become part of the 'Sell All Your Body Time Space' culture, and to appear on the firm's website as one of its most 'recent acquisitions.' This installation is the most striking aestheticization of the bio-political administration, rationalization, surveillance and commodification of bodies, space and time—the essential material of all life—by global corporations. Certainly, this installation reflects an objective social reality: corporations really do commodify bodies, spaces, and times; people really do sell themselves to corporations; and cor-

porations do exploit and prosper off of the sale of life itself.

The transformation of the dire objective reality of capitalist exploitation and corporate power into an aesthetic work that *can be* subjectively enjoyed by the gallery's audience paints a depressing picture of the political consciousness of today's cultured elite. That many gallery audiences seemed to exhibit pleasure while pretending to sell themselves to this fictive global corporation is suggestive of the ominous ideological function of *The Corporate World*. Social disempowerment becomes empowerment with the aestheticization of capitalist power; the contradictions and inequities of the social world are imaginatively and temporarily resolved by their aestheticization, turning the recognition of social inequality into a new experiential pleasure. The possibility of radicalization is subverted by the ironic, self-reflexive and 'cynical reason' of postmodern ideology, as cultured audiences, with their taste for enlightened false consciousness, accumulate new pleasures by actively decoding a political parody that has abandoned the possibility of transforming the ugly social reality on which the joke is tragically based.

The aestheticization of an anti-corporate ethos is becoming increasingly popular; the politicization of this anti-corporate aesthetic and its articulation to an imaginative struggle that is capable of transcending the social contradictions this aesthetic symptomizes, however, remain the task of socialists. Today, the energies of the great modernist playwrights and dramaturgs—Piscator, Brecht, and Boal—should be revisited and harnessed to turn the corporation's ongoing crisis of legitimacy, not into a new aesthetic that reflects the world, but a politicized aesthetic that proposes a genuinely different world. **R**

Supersize Me

Directed by Morgan Spurlock

After hearing about two overweight teenage girls who are suing McDonald's, Morgan Spurlock offers himself as a human guinea pig to test the effects of a McDonald's diet. For thirty days, Spurlock goes on a "McDiet", observing the following rules:

- Everything he eats must be on McDonald's menu
- He must order everything on the menu at least once
- He must "supersize" his meal when offered the choice

Prior to the experiment, Spurlock consults three doctors, who all declare him to be in excellent (physical) health. Not surprisingly, they all caution against this outlandish diet. As Spurlock checks in throughout the month, they all express shock at the extent of his rapidly deteriorating health. Spurlock gains 25 pounds, his cholesterol level skyrockets, his liver nearly dissolves, and he suffers from headaches, nausea, depression, signs of addiction, decreasing energy and a greatly reduced sex drive.

Although the film is not heavily loaded with factual information, Spurlock makes a strong case about the detrimental effect that the fast food industry has in the U.S. With over 100 million overweight people, the U.S. is the fattest nation on earth, and is by far the most overwhelmed by the fast food industry. An alarming 40 percent of Americans eat fast food every day, and the increased availability of fast food and increase in the number of overweight people appears to be strongly correlated.

A particularly strong part of the film is the often dominating presence of junk food found in public schools. Spurlock visits a middle school cafeteria in suburban Chicago where French fries serve as the "vegetable" and Country Time lemonade (which has the same sugar content as cola) serves as "juice". An alternative school in Wisconsin, meanwhile, offers a radically different picture. The school's cafeteria only offers nutritious and non-processed food in its cafeteria. Members of the school's faculty and

Reviewed by Matt and Samantha Fodor

administration attest that this greatly contributed to students' improved behavior.

Another powerful aspect highlighted by Spurlock is the lack of information available to consumers about the health content of fast food. Supposedly healthy alternatives such as "McSalads" are no healthier than burgers or fries. Spurlock visits all 84 McDonald's locations in Manhattan and half of them do not have charts that provide nutritional information. In another scene, Spurlock and crew show pictures of Ronald McDonald and Jesus to schoolchildren, the children all only recognize the clown. Spurlock himself seems to undergo a shift in the film from blaming the lack of "personal responsibility" to the lack of "corporate responsibility" in terms of "the McDonaldization of society". The lack of nutritional information available to the public and the intense marketing to children strongly undermines claims that individuals, not the fast food industry, are primarily responsible.

The film has two significant weaknesses, however. First, Spurlock neglects to address causes of obesity that are not related to overeating. The body has natural defenses against starvation and when people do suffer from starvation, it slows down the body's metabolism.

This is why poor people are disproportionately overweight. The lack of any real class analysis is the second weakness of the film. While Spurlock scrutinizes big business and points out that they are primarily motivated by profit-making and notes that many people eat fast food because its affordability and convenience, he does not make the connection regarding the disproportionate number of poor people among the overweight. He notes that the most overweight states are Mississippi and West Virginia and the most overweight city is Detroit, but fails to point out that these are among the poorest places in the U.S.

Despite its faults, however, *Supersize Me* is a very entertaining and informative documentary, and is of great political relevance. **R**



The Motorcycle Diaries

Directed by Walter Salles

Reviewed by Douglas Williams

Genuine revolutionary heroes are a rarity on the silver screen. Hollywood prefers its rebels to be apolitical, self-destructive and defeated. For every film that even dares to mention a Lenin, a Trotsky or a Castro, there are a dozen celluloid rebels without causes (not to mention scores of crypto-fascist Schwarzeneggers and every other shade of reactionary in the bourgeois palette). This hobbling of a potent catalyst for social change is a hallmark of capitalism's squandering of the greatest art form: the cinema.

But, hope for humanity - and for the cinema - springs eternal. So, in approaching Walter Salles's new film, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, based on journals written by the young Che Guevara during an extended motorcycle trip, I found myself cautious about its potential and hoping for greatness. However, the film is problematic on two levels. The first is its use of politics as a come-on; the second is its cultish celebration of a dubious political icon.

For a mass audience, *The Motorcycle Diaries* has many potentially appealing elements: it's a road movie, a buddy picture, a young man's sexual odyssey and an exotic travelogue, all lent dignity by its hero's philosophic journey towards adult social commitment. However, it substitutes a tone of reverence bordering on worship for outright politics. In fact, if you changed the household name of its protagonist, this could be the story of any of thousands of young men from every generation who are seized with a desire to help suffering humanity -

through doctoring, scientific research, or regrettably, charity or the priesthood.

It's 1952, and Ernesto Guevara de la Serna (Gael García Bernal) is a 23-year-old medical student. Almost finished training, he leaves his upper-middle class home in Buenos Aires to go on a road trip with friend Alberto Granado (Rodrigo De La Serna), a robust biochemist. The two ride off on a temperamental Norton 500, to fulfill a dream: to explore their native Latin America. These set-up scenes are treated with poignancy and humor.

In the course of their eight-month journey - through the Andes, along the coast of Chile, across the Atacama Desert, into the Peruvian Amazon and on to Venezuela - their perspectives shift: they begin to see a Latin America from which their class privilege has insulated them. At a leper colony deep in the Peruvian Amazon, the two begin to question the economic system that denies medicine, education and a decent livelihood to so many. Their experience awakens in them the men they will later become. One will return to his research with a renewed sense of purpose. The other will go on to become a major revolutionary leader of the 20th century.

Potential comparisons with other "rite of passage" films abound. For those who go way back, *Easy Rider* set the template, and its nihilism and narcissistic despair contrast sharply with the liberal humanism of *The Motorcycle Diaries*.

Hollywood usually depicts rebels as outlaws. *Bonnie and Clyde*

(1967), made the year Che was murdered by the CIA-backed Bolivian army, typified Hollywood's penchant for linking iconoclastic views with criminality. Its bank-robbing lovers were portrayed as (apolitical) rebels against the Depression-era squalor in which they were trapped. A mega-hit, *Bonnie and Clyde* stood as a thinly-veiled warning to a radicalized generation that had started to take politics into the streets in unprecedented numbers. Film students analyzed and movie critics reveled in the gory climax. The assassinations of Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King and the murders at Kent State, Jackson and Attica followed soon after.

(Faux) rebels were suddenly "hot". Two years later, *Easy Rider*'s chopper-riding "hippies" (who bore greater resemblance to Hell's Angels) contextualized Hollywood-style rebellion with a big heroin sale in the film's opening moments. *Easy Rider*'s central conceit was that, for the 'Sixties generation, these itinerant lumpen embodied the very essence of "freedom". It is indicative of the film's real politics that, in today's Haliburton/Enron culture, they look like mildly eccentric entrepreneurs. Leftist politics was nowhere in sight, and I shed no tears when its biker heroes, Captain America and Billy, were martyred by forces even more Neanderthal than they.

Che Guevara attained iconic status in these years as well, and, while the era's fictitious symbols have faded, Che's face has shown real staying power. Is this purely because he re-

flects continuing radical sentiments, or because, for his largely-Catholic following, his myth and fate resemble that of Jesus Christ's? Either way, in the right hands, his legend is perpetually exploitable. In 1969, Hollywood cashed in with *Che!* starring Omar Sharif, and Jack Palance as Castro. The film is a veteran of many "10 Worst" lists. It was deemed so offensive in Chile and Argentina that - in a fine, early example of "interactive cinema" - Molotov cocktails were thrown at the screen in some theaters.

Che Guevara's life and legacy have been subjects of heated debate among socialists, as well. In the eyes of some, he is an unqualified hero who sacrificed himself in open warfare with the bourgeois state. As a leader of the Cuban revolution, his credentials and his sacrifice seem unimpeachable. However, to others, he was a deluded romantic who sowed ultra-left illusions among the workers and peasants of Latin America, utterly failed to build a peasant-based revolutionary movement, and was martyred uselessly and tragically while leading a futile (and elitist) guerilla struggle against overwhelming odds.

Whatever your opinion, Che's place in Hollywood's pantheon of idealistic martyrs is assured. His noble failure appeals to middle class film makers and the wealthy who finance the industry. These films allow empathy with the oppressed and their well-meaning (and misguided) champions, but bluntly reassert ruling class justice right before the final curtain. *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Captain America* and *Billy* - even *Spartacus* and *Jesus Christ* - are all destroyed while bucking the social order. In this cinematic finger-wagging, rebels - "good" and "bad" - always get their comeuppance, courtesy of the bourgeois (or Roman) state.

The Motorcycle Diaries is a liberal-humanist work of modest appeal. Its direction and cinematography are refreshingly free of the overproduced hyper-realism of contemporary Hollywood. It reflects the youthful exuberance of its protagonists in an artful and

witty manner and delineates the sentimental radicalization - I hesitate to say "politicization" - of Che Guevara. But it fails as the political primer it could and should be.

The climax of the film involves a symbolic gesture, ostensibly made by Che, when, despite his asthma, he swims across a dark and dangerous river from a staff party on the leper colony's mainland, to an island where the most serious cases are quarantined. The film then cuts to group photos of the afflicted with a smiling Doctor Che "in solidarity" with his patients, indifferent to the threat of contagion - and clearly pleased at his self-conscious manufacture of a legend-building moment. Lacking even the mild charm of the journey scenes, this pretentious climax sinks the film rather than help-



ing it transcend its anemic ambition.

The production circumstances of *The Motorcycle Diaries* are somewhat unusual: it was made by Serenade Films, a company created on a self-styled "egalitarian business model" in which the filming team works for extremely low but equal fees and then shares equally in the revenue from the sale and distribution of the film. Think of it as socialism in one company. Does this make the film worth supporting?

Well, before we envision a guerilla band of filmmaker-revolutionaries on the loose, making films that will spark the masses into action, let's listen to its executive producer talk about the project. He expresses the ambivalence of the class of people who marshal this powerful medium, when faced with rebels who question their privileges:

"Che Guevara can be such a tricky subject. I knew Walter (Salles) would handle the story with lyricism and humanity rather than focusing on the politics of who Ernesto would later become."

The executive producer is Robert Redford.

The phrase "lyricism and humanity rather than focusing on the politics" perfectly defines the limitations imposed on artists who deal with political subjects. For producers like Redford, a man noted for refined, liberal taste, "lyricism and humanity" represent truths of a higher order.

So, are we to be thankful for the generosity of a group of wealthy liberals who take it on themselves to lecture us about the fate of good intentions? Should we be grateful for these crumbs of hope from the bourgeois table? Is the production well-intentioned? Do its producers deserve credit for illuminating what their publicity flack calls "the most important revolutionary of the 20th century"? Or do all those T-shirts and contemporary anti-imperialist sentiment just represent a fine business opportunity for middle class aesthetes who like an occasional flirtation with dangerous ideas?

Che Guevara is the kind of revolutionary the ruling class prefers (with reservations, of course!): he operated far from the urban proletariat, free from the prying eyes of the press, isolated in mountainous jungle where he was easily mythologised. He fought a guerilla war in which he was hopelessly outgunned by state forces. He never got a single peasant to join him. He was romantic, wrong-headed, defeated and martyred: a pretty face suitable for framing, the embodiment of the certain failure of youthful revolutionary aspirations everywhere. **R**

The Motorcycle Diaries is Chapter One. Next year, Chapter Two - a new film about Che's bloody annihilation - will appear. By glorifying and fetishizing them, bourgeois culture sets up these straw men in order to knock them down, again and again.

Bringing Class and Empire In: The Coming Debate on Industrial Strategy

Sam Gindin

The following introductory remarks were made to the Socialist Project Labour Forum on January 16, 2005.

Recent papers from the Canadian Labour Congress and by the CAW's chief economist Jim Stanford have revived the importance of addressing an 'industrial strategy' for the Canadian economy – a term generally taken to mean government intervention in markets to support the development of Canada's higher technology manufacturing sectors. Putting this on the agenda and raising it as an alternative to neoliberalism restructuring is clearly welcome. All aspects of our lives and future possibilities depend on our ability to challenge and influence how our economy is being reshaped.

But how we frame this issue is absolutely crucial. To begin with, we cannot simply counter 'neoliberalism' to 'government intervention' without addressing the *class content* of that intervention. It should by now be clear that government intervention in itself can be regressive as well as progressive. In the name of strengthening the economy, governments have very *actively* intervened to strengthen corporate objectives, shifting resources and power by way of - to take just a few examples - the inegalitarian redistribution of taxes, corporate subsidies in the face of cutbacks in social services, legal and administrative limits on labour activity, centralization of education to the Ministry of Education to control and reorient its content, the government's leadership role in implementing and administering NAFTA, etc. .

Second, we cannot address the restructuring of the Canadian economy without locating ourselves within the global economy – which primarily means *our relationship to the US and the American empire*. This does not mean that we can do nothing until we break from the US. Rather it demands that: a) Whatever we do today should be done in the context of developing the possibility of *eventually* creating the economic, political and democratic space to experiment with a substantive alternative within Canada; and b) That we are honest about the kind of opposition we will get if we even just begin moving towards such a measure of democratic sovereignty. That attack will come not just from American capital and the American state; 'Canadian' business itself will be leading the charge.

Third, the traditional notion of an 'industrial strategy' suffers from its limited scope as well as its implicit notion of how we relate to the international economy. In focussing the issue of restructuring on high-value added

manufacturing, 'industrial strategies' tend to *exclude* most of manufacturing, low-paid services, and the public sector (or include them only insofar as they contribute to that industrial strategy). This not only narrows the issue of restructuring to a small portion of the workforce (perhaps 5%-10%), but it also reinforces the denigration of other sectors by treating them as secondary (or, in some cases, even a hindrance) according to the taken-for-granted criteria of contributing to high value-added international competitiveness. (It is, in this context, worth reminding ourselves that the US in fact has long had the kind of high-value added, high-tech sectors that 'industrial strategies' look to, without this translating into the kind of society we hope to build).

All of this leads to a final consideration. Policies are one thing, but the real issue is developing the *political capacity* to bring those changes to life. This may seem obvious enough, but it's only if we appreciate how radical any policy would have to be in order to be 'realistic', that we can appreciate how profound the demands on our political capacities must be. Moreover, policies and political capacities are not two distinct spheres (goals and means) but inter-dependent. To the extent that the development of capacities is the goal, policies that favour education and mobilization from below are to be favoured over technocratic and top down policies.

Let me make the above more concrete by way of a summary and by raising issues for further discussion:

1. Any industrial strategy must be sensitive to and eventually address the larger context of the Canada-US relationship. This implies coming to grips with free trade and the regulation, domestic as well as international, of finance and investment (and cannot be separated from political issues like Canada's participation in 'missile defence').
2. Since neoliberal restructuring affects all sectors, and since building a base within the working class as a whole is of central importance, we need to move beyond 'industrial strategies' and redefine the issue in the broader terms of developing '*sectoral* strategies' that address all manufacturing sectors not just 'high-tech', services as well as manufacturing, the public sector as well as the private.
3. Within each sector, sectoral committees must orient themselves to, and organize around, both the needs

of workers in that particular sector (which may cross union lines), and the mutual needs of the working class broadly defined. This implies:

a) Addressing the issue of *democratizing the process by which production and services are created in their sector*. The particular focus will vary across sectors, depending on the nature of the sector, its role in the economy, and the balance of working class power within it. In the retail sector, for example, the principle issue may be unionization of the sector so workers have a collective voice; in auto the focus may be on restoring the safeguards of the auto pact and to manage trade and overcapacity; nurses may redefine their role relative to doctors; in public utilities it may be municipal ownership; in aerospace it may be nationalization with new forms of worker-community involvement.

b) As providers of good and services to other working people, and as part of building the broader solidarities we all ultimately depend on, the sectoral committees would also mobilize around the nature of what they produce (*'responsible production'*). Some examples that build on what some unions have to some degree already initiated are: teachers challenging the streaming of working class kids; auto workers leading on environmental issues; health care workers exposing the impact of alleged 'efficiencies'; utility workers acting as whistle blowers on lax public health concerns; social workers moving from policing their clients to mobilizing with them on poverty issues; federal UI workers providing counter-pamphlets to workers on how they can circumvent administrative crackdowns; paper

workers addressing the diversification of one-industry towns; etc.

c) These struggles will lead to *some* issues crossing sectors and may therefore emerge as the basis of national (or community) campaigns, e.g. taking on NAFTA, democratizing investment whether domestic or international, reduced work-time, public health as an immediately workplace and community issue.

4. None of this can happen without unions and without changes in what unions *are*: how they see their role; their range of possible activities; how resources are allocated; the scope and style of educational work; the depth of union democracy and forums created for these larger issues; relationships to other unions and movements; etc.

But neither can this happen within unions alone. Unions remain fragmented from each other and from other activism; their membership base demands attention to narrower and specific issues; the daily pressure they face limit their institutional commitment to initiating new directions. The point of organizing ourselves is to begin doing what must be done, but which unions are unlikely to do on their own. The organizational goal is therefore to bring together activists that exist and work both inside and outside of unions – activists with a perspective beyond unionism, who aim to link workers across unions as they also works to rejuvenate and transform unions so as to broaden the scope of alternatives that are 'realistic'. **R**

Windsor Holds Forum on Imperialism and Workers Today

Richard Harding

On February 22, 2005, the Windsor Section of the Socialist Project held the first forum of its 2005 Speakers Series, "Capitalism, Imperialism and the Impact on Workers Today". Sam Gindin (retired) and Herman Rosenfeld of the CAW national made presentations to a good audience. In light of the blizzard conditions of the day this was a resounding success.

Both presenters outlined the need for the labour movement to come up with new strategies in dealing with capitalism. Rosenfeld pointed out the lack of organizing efforts in the fast food service industry and important debates on the question of an industrial policy for Canada that does not involve subsidies. The pressure on Canadian workers and unions brought about by increasing integration with the US was also discussed.

The current left-nationalist government of Hugo Chavez Frias in Venezuela and the gains it has made the fight against neo-liberalism through popular organization of the working poor were highlighted as well. Gindin

traveled to Venezuela and had witnessed the referendum on Chavez's presidency. He stated his amazement with the mobilization of the poor in support of the Bolivarian process initiated by Chavez. The worker supported nationalization of Venepreal, a major industrial enterprise which produces cardboard (among other products), was seen by Gindin as further evidence of the Venezuelan government's desire to take a measure of control over the nation's economy. The presentation included a viewing of *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, a documentary made during the April 2002 attempted coup to oust Chavez and replace him with a business and U.S. friendly dictator chosen from among the ranks of the Venezuelan elite.

This forum will be followed by others. The next speaker will be Dr. James Brophy, co-author of the Gilbertson/Brophy report which shed light on elevated levels of cancer, birth defects and other maladies in Windsor (and other Great Lakes communities) due to industrial pollution. This presentation is set for March 26. **R**

Ontario Days of Action

Herman Rosenfeld

We are living in a moment when labour movement in Ontario and in Canada as a whole is having great difficulty in organizing resistance to major attacks by capital through the state and in individual sectors and workplaces. From the defeat of the HEU workers in BC, to the closure of the Joncquiere Wal-Mart, from the threats to hospital workers and P3's in Ontario, to the triumphant 10 year anniversary of NAFTA, the labour movement refuses to build the kind of movements necessary to turn the tables on employers, investors and their politician friends. In this spirit, it makes a lot of sense to look back to the experience of the Ontario Days of Action in the mid 1990's.

The following is based upon a presentation I made to the Union of Progressive Forces (UFP) in Montreal, last February. Members of that left party were considering how to build a fightback movement against the Charest government in Quebec.

1) Why the Days of Action?

The election of Mike Harris in 1995 signalled a major shift in Ontario politics and a real challenge to the labour movement. It represented the "hard" version of neo-liberalism, strongly influenced by American conservatives. Harris ran on a platform of tax cuts (both as a stimulative and as an ideological statement). It included a hard-edged attack on social welfare (workfare); calls for balanced budgets and rhetoric about the "waste" of state spending and law and order. It was relatively free of social conservative appeals.

His program was called the "Common Sense Revolution", (CSR) and soon after the Tories took power,

they cut social assistance rates by 21%, repealed the NDP's anti-scab law, added hurdles to union organizing, ended pay and employment equity, attacked Health & Safety, compensation, education, health care systems and the rights of public sector workers.

He was elected with the support of many workers, who supported the tax-cut appeal, the attacks on social welfare and the law and order platform.

The way was paved by the experience of the previous NDP government. A big recession created huge government deficits. The NDP replied with a modified and less vicious form of neo-liberalism: it engineered cuts and rationalization, (using some of the same principles that the current Ontario Liberals are so enamoured with). It also brought in progressive reforms – but even those reforms were couched in a class-collaborative and competitiveness-oriented discourse.

Premier Bob Rae implemented what was called a "Social Contract", attacked the public sector, took away bargaining rights, (forced 12 unpaid days), and reinforced, in the public mind that economic health and government services were antithetical.

There were major divisions amongst the union movement over this – rooted in basic approach to how to respond to corporate restructuring: some more oriented to a fight-back orientation (CAW, CUPE, OPSEU, CUPW) and a challenge to the ideology of competitiveness, others (known as the *Pink Paper* group) argued for collaborative efforts with enlightened employers, based upon a philosophy of "progressive competitiveness". This division played a key role in the next decade.

Many ordinary workers saw that NDP didn't have any answers for them, attacked unions, and besides,

they thought, "if the public sector was to blame, why not elect someone who will really do something about it." Further, frustrated with the results of NDP (and Federal government) cuts, people began to opt for individual solutions – hence, they voted for Harris. Harris made a specific attempt, as neo-liberals do, to craft his message to specific sectors of the working class as supporters.

There was a heated debated within the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) about how to respond to Harris. Positions mirrored the divisions within the union movement, but all had to face up to the challenge presented by the fact that many members had supported Harris. On the other hand, all wanted to mount some form of resistance.

*The nature of this response was, of necessity defensive, since no one really had any real sense of an alternative (and they still don't), some wanting to hold on to the status quo, the so-called "kinder/gentler" Ontario of old. Capital, on the other hand, totally embraced Harris. A key element was the attitudes towards the NDP. The question posed was: is the purpose of political action to strengthen the fortunes of the party, or to build resistance to Harris? Those who argued the former, didn't want to do anything to turn people off to the party. Those who argued the latter were committed to some sort of mass action. A key lesson we can learn from this is: *If the primary goal of political action is getting elected, rather than winning over working people to your platform, it can dwarf all other goals.**

CAW President Hargrove argued that labour should concentrate on pressuring employers not to support Harris. It was suggested to strike all major employers in individual cities as

part of this strategy. Some unions were opposed to this. For all of the reasons that underlay their philosophical differences, they would not strike employers, but would agree to organize/participate in a series of demonstrations.

2) The Days of Action Happen

The OFL brokered the agreement to organize a series of Days of Action that would include one-day general strikes and demonstrations; the first one was held in London, Dec 11, 1995.

There was also a community component to this: Each community would organize a community coalition, which would join the demonstrations, picket lines and do education and mobilization. Each city where the Days of Action would be organized would be co-chaired by labour and community people, and was truly a joint effort. This created all kinds of opportunities, but challenges as well: unions had resources and community groups resented the power it gave them; there were often resentments over political

difference; unionists seen as outside interlopers; community activists were directly targeted by Harris but private sector unions had their collective agreements to shield them from the worst attacks. Unions pay for a corps of organizers who go from community to community to make it happen, from key OFL affiliates;

London/Hamilton/Toronto – were key moments of the struggle. London was the first, of what was to be 11 different Days of Action. The key centres were in Hamilton (steel centre) and Toronto. But they also were held in different regions and smaller industrial towns: Kitchener, North Bay, St. Catharines, Kingston and Windsor. (Oshawa was left out for a reason)

Each involved major challenges, but the key was convincing workers – many of whom had supported Harris – to voluntarily strike their employer in order to challenge Harris's policies. This required tireless efforts to develop arguments, find venues, and engage workers in political discussion and education. The people who carried this out were usually left-

oriented union militants, local leadership and a core of political activists in the union who were used to “going beyond” electoral activities. They did things like organizing informal and formal union meetings to debate and vote on participation. They also developed materials. This was a different kind of politics than the normal electoral variety – and, given the obvious irrelevancy of the NDP at the time it kindled a new interest in a notion of politics as education and mobilization.

The first few Days of Action succeeded in closing down employers, shutting down cities and organizing mass demonstrations. (In each place, though, the key thing was the education done with workers before the demo's, and the learning that went along with it – by the organizers and the people who were organized). London was organized in -30 degrees; 50,000 demonstrated; in Hamilton, over 100,000, and more in Toronto. (The latter was said to be the largest demonstration in Canadian history)

The political and strategic divisions within the union movement also were reflected. →



“Pink paper” unions refused to strike employers, but some mobilized in demos. In some instances, they re-scheduled vacation days, in order to close down but not strike their employers. The others, CAW, CUPE, CUPW, OPSEU and teachers and transit workers did mobilize and strike. There were debates about what role the NDP would play in each demonstration. They continued to spark furious arguments within the union movement and in communities.

3) Days of Action End

The movement built to a crescendo, midway into 1996/97, when the elementary school teachers unions went on strike against the government. After losing a union-sponsored court challenge against back-to-work legislation, Harris’s Education Minister, Dave Johnson, blinked and it looked like there might be an opening. Even public opinion seemed to be in transition. A number of unions, such as CUPE and the CAW even promised to financially support the teachers, if further efforts to smash the strike were to be applied. But at the last minute, the teachers gave up and settled without making gains. After they went back, the momentum swung back and Harris continued his agenda.

After it became clear, by the end of 1997 that there would be no breakthrough in building support for the strikes within the Pink Paper unions, the movement began to die down. The final few cities were shut down by busloads of militants from large CAW locals, and a hardy group of activists.

By mid 1998, the Days of Action were called off. In 1999, a provincial election was called, and Harris was re-elected, although with a reduced majority.

4) Evaluating the Days of Action

Fundamentally, the Days of Action were a defensive action. At their inception, the working class was not

in a period of militant struggle, and many workers agreed with key aspects of the CSR. One goal was to convince workers to oppose Harris’s policies and mobilize them to challenge employers against Harris. A second goal was to pressure Harris to withdraw those policies.

But others, with a broader vision, hoped to use the enthusiasm and collective learning generated in the Days of Action to build towards a larger strike movement. This would have required a network of politically-oriented activists that were capable of challenging the dominance of right-wing social democratic leaders in charge of those unions. This did not exist. As well, this overestimated the level of political consciousness. Given these realities, the movement could not build beyond individual days of protest. There were some who argued that the goal had to be an unlimited general strike. Others, emphasized the need for tactics that would “shut the province down”, in spite of working-class opinions. These latter two tendencies, overlooked the real challenge of engaging and changing the opinions of workers. They were marginal.

Successes

The Days of Action succeeded in generating a level of political activity unprecedented in recent history. Worker activists developed the capacity to talk about political issues with co-workers. A significant number of workers struck their employers over political issues. Given that real change takes place over the long term – this provided a key base for future struggles and political activity: activists who learned that politics is more than elections; understanding the need for collective action, independent of and in opposition to capital; learning about the neo-liberal agenda.

It is no accident that many participants in the Days of Action, went on to participate-in, lead, teach and carry out the same kind of organizational and educational work with co-workers, during the anti-globalization

movement in Quebec, Windsor and elsewhere. As well, it directly preceded and partly coincided with a series of workplace occupations that were organized in the CAW over the next 5 years.

It sowed the seeds of opposition to the CSR in the working class and in communities. It opened the eyes of a lot of working people to the reality underlying neo-liberal politics. It built links between working class activists in communities and unions, breaking down stereotypes of each.

Shortcomings

They didn’t force Harris to back down and he was re-elected. The movement was unable to build towards a general strike. The Pink Paper unions remained impervious to attempts to build a fight-back trend within them. Divisions within the union movement were deepened, as key strategic issues went unresolved (and remain so to this day). There was no ability to come up with alternatives to neo-liberalism, and the electoral alternative of the NDP remained.

Community coalitions disappeared after each Day of Action as private sector workers remained separated from and unable to link up with the victims of social service cuts. Communities of colour and ethnic minorities remained outside the movement.

As a socialist, I think that there are larger lessons to draw upon:

- Everywhere capital is in power today, (which means just about everywhere) neo-liberalism is part of their rule. There are hard and soft versions, but whether the ruling party is openly big business, social democratic (capitalism which attempts to limit its harshest features), or a mixture, like the PQ, the reality is that as long as you accept the logic of capital, there can be no alternatives.
- This represents a tremendous defeat for the left and for the working

class movement. There have been massive outbreaks of resistance to neo-liberalism – and Days of Action is an example. They have created important capacities and political learning. On the other hand, nowhere, have they developed the kind of capacities sufficient to reverse the power of capital. Everywhere, neo-liberalism remains in force to one extent or another.



- This is not the fault of so-called bureaucratic union leaders, or those who honestly can't see the potential of an alternative way of organizing society, other than that of private markets and accumulation. It is our own shortcomings, the lack of a socialist left that is the key missing component.

- A socialist network of unionists, we could have spread a radical, class struggle outlook throughout the union movement, and perhaps moved towards a general strike. If there was an organization of socialists going beyond unions, we could have built a lasting coalition of communities and unions, geared towards challenging neo-liberal attacks on workers in workplaces and communities, working to develop environmentally-friendly alternative ways of looking after community needs. If there was a socialist political organization of workers, we could have put forward alternatives to neo-liberal policies and corporate restructuring and organized around those demands to build our collective understanding and confidence – rather than simply “nostalgia” for some unattainable golden age of labour/capital partnership.

With a socialist political project, we could have summarized our experiences with the NDP – a party that argued then, and argues today, that you can make fundamental changes without challenging the existing social system. We could have asked ourselves, things like, “should we be looking to create a different kind of political voice for working people, and if this makes us temporarily unable to have any real effects in electoral politics, then shouldn't we concentrate on building a base within the working class in the meantime?”

We didn't do those things, because we lacked a political project that could work to rebuild the capacity of working class people to collectively analyze, strategize, organize, and learn lessons, in the spirit of challenging the logic of private enterprise and private accumulation.

And today, the need is still there: we are groping for alternatives in our key industries and sectors. There is no capacity to link up working class struggles with a broader challenge to globalization. The public sector is increasingly downsized and transformed to look like the private sector and once again, social democracy – in the form of the NDP – is portraying itself as the alternative. We still haven't been able to think through the proper relationship between

extra-parliamentary forms of political action and electoral activity. And there still is no real independent voice for socialist education, building on short-term gains, in order to learn longer-term lessons.

We still don't have this kind of project in Ontario, although the Socialist Project is part of the effort to create one.

R



Remembering the Days of Action, Re-Orienting Socialist Strategy

Tanner Mirrlees

Present-day activists and working people can learn from past struggles and experiences, political victories and defeats. When revisited, socialist and working class histories are tremendously useful tools. The past can help us to understand “where we came from,” “where we are” and “where we could be going.” Remembering the past can help us to analyze the political limitations and potentialities of the present, and guide our struggles toward a different future.

The Days of Action (DOA) was a crucial moment in Ontario’s working class history. Throughout the mid to late 1990’s, massive numbers of working people, unions, and activists mobilized across Ontario to oppose the neo-liberal re-structuring implemented by Mike Harris’s “common sense revolution”. Last February, trade union activists, organizers, students, and workers assembled at the Steel Workers Hall in Toronto to participate in “The Days of Action: Asking Some Hard Questions.” Organized by the Socialist Project, this public forum and process of collectively remembering brought together different tendencies of the Toronto Left in a constructive dialogue about the limitations and potentialities of the DOA. The first hour of the forum featured a panel discussion by a number of the DOA participants and organizers. The second part of the forum featured group workshops. Throughout the day, forum participants remembered, debated, and learned from the successes and failures, political strengths and weaknesses, and wider historical and global contexts of the DOA.

John Cartwright of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council declared that the DOA was successful. It organized a vast number of Canadian working people in a common struggle,

built new relationships and networks between unions and community groups, and gave rise to a widespread and popular opposition to neo-liberal reforms and cutbacks. Cartwright emphasized that the DOA slowed down (or at least postponed) the consolidation of Mike Harris’s vicious “common sense” revolution. Core to Cartwright’s evaluation of the DOA was his contention that it was a powerful vehicle for developing class consciousness and solidarity, symbolically resisting neo-liberalism, and contributing to the development of the anti-globalization movement.

In a sobering response, John Clarke of OCAP reminded Cartwright that despite the significance of DOA’s mobilization and meaningful politicization of working people, it did not stop the Harris regime from ultimately implementing devastating structural adjustments and achieving ideological dominance. For Clarke, DOA was a “squandered opportunity” for the Left: it was simply “not enough” to counter the ascendancy of the political Right to provincial state power (Clarke recounted how Harris regarded the DOA as “a good show”). Clarke argued that the key weakness of the DOA (and the Left in general) was rooted in its inability to articulate a palpable and future-oriented political alternative to neo-liberalism (and capitalism), and its dependence on the leadership of union bureaucrats. For Clarke, union leadership (anachronistically) acted as though employers were still functioning within the mindset of the post-war Keynesian period, when social and economic compromises were made with the working classes to neutralize the potential for radicalization and to feed the consumer-driven economy. Clarke concluded his discussion by reminding the

audience that the days of the “Keynesian compromise” were long over. Only by organizing independently of the labor leadership and developing a more radical, militant and oppositional strategy, argued Clarke, could the Left make a genuine political difference.

Natalie Mehra of the Ontario Health Coalition reflected upon the difficulty of cementing together a diverse range of political concerns, cultural interests, and community activist groups during the DOA. Mehra’s personal reflections on group in-fighting, disjunctures between union organizers and community activists, and the different levels of political consciousness that existed between and through both the labor movements and community networks, underscored the challenge of unifying a fragmented, sometimes divided and heterogeneous Left. Mehra contended that though the DOA successfully mobilized many people, it was unable to foster a collective political understanding or unified consciousness about the nature of capitalism, capitalist state power, and the broader social relations, forces, and contradictions that “the system” gave rise to. Furthermore, Mehra touched upon the difficulty of establishing worker solidarity across the divided private and public sector. For the Left to be effective in the future, argued Mehra, it needed to forge networks with diverse political communities; it needed to bridge the gap between private and public sector workers; it needed to establish spaces of communication to support ongoing political dialogue and education; finally, it needed develop new tactics for uniting different group struggles and interests in a coherent socialist alliance.

Like Clarkson, Carolyn Egan from the International Socialists con-

tended that the DOA was a “squandered opportunity” that had resulted from the compromised position of the union bureaucracy. But Egan did not discount the political significance and capacities of organized labor, nor the potential efficacy of socialist activists working within the institutional structures of unions. Rather, Egan asserted that by “working from below,” labor activists could radicalize the less politically conscious members of unions, place upward pressure on the bureaucratic elite, and affect, transform, and shape the political direction of the union as a whole. Egan argued that this process of “building class consciousness” was tremendously important, given that many workers had forgotten about the experience, utility, and purpose of collective action and class solidarity. But all hope was not lost. For Egan, the widespread contradictions and conflicts produced by neo-liberalism and global capitalism signaled the emergence of new political openings for the Left to regroup, recruit, and struggle. Egan concluded by challenging the Left—in all its guises—to embrace rather than “squander” the new opportunity to become history’s vanguard. Only by “speaking with people” rather “than speaking on behalf of people,” concluded Egan, would the Left be able to fulfill its revolutionary role.

Sam Gindin of the Socialist Project, the panel’s final presenter, declared that the the DOA was not a “squandered opportunity,” but rather a belated effort to contain and defeat powerful neo-liberal blocs and the forces of global capitalism at a time when these emergent political and economic forms had already become highly organized, disciplined, and increasingly entrenched within the dominant structures and apparatuses of most national states around the world. Gindin argued that the consolidation of neo-liberalism represented a crucial defeat for the Left. Though some important mobilizations against global capital emerged following the DOA (ie. worker-led mobilizations across the globe in the mid-90s prior to the anti-

globalization protests in Seattle), they did not have the political capacities required to reverse existing trends. Hence, during the DOA, Ontario’s Left simply didn’t have the organizational, ideological and human capacities to challenge neo-liberal hegemony and global capitalism. There was no sense blaming the “Labor Bureaucracy” or “the Big Union” for the failure of DOA—they were not the sole agents of revolutionary social transformation (indeed, many unionized workers elected Harris). Also, it was futile to blame social-democratic parties at the level of national-states for the DOA’s shortcomings—their Giddensesque “third-way” compromise with capital was explicitly clear and tremendously popular. Rather, if the Left wanted to be honest with itself about the weaknesses of the DOA, declared Gindin, it must reflect upon its own weaknesses: its inability to expand the social base of protest into unions that had stood apart from the work stoppages; its failure to provide any creative leadership in keeping the local coalitions active after the DOA ended; its inability to propose and place larger political alternatives and issues on the national agenda; and its inability to recruit activists to a more radical politics. For Gindin, the DOA indicated

the need for a new Left organization that was rooted amongst both networks of workers and networks of activist groups. Indeed, as much as the revolutionary Left needed the organized working classes to bring about a widespread transformation to existing relations of production, intimated Gindin, the organized working classes needed a revolutionary Left to develop a stronger organizational form and more coherent political strategy to facilitate this struggle and transformative process.

Remembering the Days of Action was a valuable learning experience. Indeed, rather than waiting for crisis build-ups to produce political openings which are either “squandered” or simply mis-recognized as a sign of capitalism’s systemic weaknesses, the Left should develop new capacities, build a more coherent organizational form, construct a new vision of the future, and work toward the execution of a hegemonic strategy. Certainly, the political challenge will be to re-think, rebuild, and reform social movements and social coalitions in order to win the kinds of political struggles that the DOA were able to mobilize support for. **R**

March 19th Anti-War Protests in Toronto: Get involved!

Responding to calls from the European and World Social Forums for mobilizations on Saturday, March 19th, against the American occupation of Iraq, the Toronto Stop the War Coalition is planning a mass rally at 1.00pm, March 19th in Nathan Phillips Square, followed by a protest outside the American Embassy on University Avenue. The main slogans are: “Troops Out Now, The World Still Says ‘No To War’”. The Coalition, which is comprised of approximately twenty organizations, is discussing with the Canadian Labour Congress and the Toronto Labour Council how best to achieve maximum participa-

tion from the trade-unionists. On the morning of March 19th, the Steelworkers are organizing a special breakfast for participants. Most of the Mosques in the Toronto area have been contacted and a special appeal has been sent out to area student councils. The mobilization will be one of many that will be taking place in major cities around the world on the second anniversary of this brutal aggression against the Iraqi people.

Leafletting and posterling are taking place throughout the city. For more information, contact: www.nowar.ca

The Ontario McLiberal Government:

Reflections of a Trade Unionist

Mary Catherine McCarthy



Now that we are more than one year out from the 2003 Ontario election it's probably a good idea to take stock of the government record.

Coming from Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), where I have been an active member for some 15 years in the health sector, and now as staff for the last six years with the university sector, there is certainly a great deal to reflect on and ask 'what has changed?' Since the 80's, CUPE has been involved with parallel campaigns during elections that primarily focus on issues of under-funding of the public sector. All governments — Liberal, New Democratic Party and Conservative — have deliberately underfunded the public sector.

As an activist I complained about both money and staff being directed to support NDP campaigns and not enough resources to mobilizing members on the key issues of the day. For the last several years especially since the Rae NDP government, our campaigns have been less and less electoral and more issue-based. As well intentioned as these campaigns have been, the results of these efforts cannot be characterized as success. We don't get any closer to electing a labour friendly government. In fact our efforts have backfired with many unions (not CUPE) promoting strategic voting.

Reflection on this recent history leaves few conclusions other than no matter who is in power at Queen's Park we are up against the same policies of starving the public sector, privatizing

and creating markets in areas where the public sector has historically been. How are things different with this Liberal government? A big difference for public sector workers and their unions, and it may be a case of diminished expectations, is that at least they speak with us.

At meetings over the last year, various CUPE Ontario jurisdictions have reported that under the Liberals the attacks on the broader public sector are still happening though perhaps not with the crassness of the Harris Eves regime. Initially the government seemed to have a softer approach to professionals like teachers and nurses (who supported them). More recent restrictions on hospital and education funding have now alienated nurses and teachers. Support workers however are not invited to the discussion and if they are even considered they are not a priority for decent jobs but a service that can be sold to the lowest bidder.

Municipalities are still starved and aside from the more progressive bunch in Toronto many other cities are forcing privatization and contracting out on their municipal employees. The utilities affected by Bill 100 are facing Dwight Duncan, the minister of energy, who thinks that that P3's are the way to go instead of electricity at cost. Hydro workers are being forced to bid on their own jobs through a system of contestability.

Homecare is in crisis with competitive bidding that is putting the non-profits out of business. P3's are still going ahead and more are planned — a

major problem because the support staff jobs are often part of the deal to be contracted out. We saw this in BC where \$18/hr jobs get turned into \$9/hr jobs. Although the Ontario Government has not yet passed the same enabling legislation for contracting out as BC, we expect to see it in Ontario.

In social services the McGuinty Liberals introduced a new initiative using terms like "measurable outcomes" which sounds like the familiar Tory diversion of resources away from actual services to people to more bureaucratic reporting.

In the School Board sector with Education Minister Gerard Kennedy - friend to teachers - workers are expected to play nice without enough money. School board trustees still make \$5000 per year. The Tory damage has not been undone. And in the university sector we have Bob Rae (now that he's a Liberal) back to do a review of post-secondary funding. From initial information it looks like we should brace ourselves for another disappointment. He seems disposed to heaping debt onto the backs of students and is looking at models notably England, Australia and the US for inspiration. All of those jurisdictions burden students and give the private/corporate sector an undue influence over universities. We met with the minister for higher education, Mary Ann Chambers, who seems to believe that corporations fund universities in a selfless philanthropic way. She acted surprised at our CUPE Campus Check findings that reported undue corporate influ

ence over many university programs.

Phony consultations around infrastructure have put union reps and potential profiteer contractors at the same table to 'brainstorm' solutions. The fact remains that super build was/is a failure and P3's are more expensive. But they won't let it go. What we need is a publicly financed infrastructure program.

Sooner or later they are going to have to raise taxes and recoup the lost revenue. The only good thing about the regressive health care premium was that at least the government realized here is a revenue problem - distinguishing themselves marginally from the Tories.

What are we doing? At CUPE we are intensifying our efforts through our no concessions strategy to coordinate bargaining and to provide strike/solidarity support for locals facing concessions. We are meeting with local leaders to make sure that they are in-

formed about the Ontario Liberal plans regarding "Reinventing Government" using the BC liberal and UK Blair models and we will be making decisions on campaigns beyond collective bargaining to defend our jobs and services. Contract settlements are still by and large coming in around 3% per year but many seem to be slipping to 2% as organizations still have to trim operating costs. Benefit programs and pensions are also under attack. Workload is a major issue now at the bargaining table. Having a union and collective bargaining rights are key front lines of defense to protect the standard of living of the working class. The right to free collective bargaining is itself coming more and more under attack as we have seen in Newfoundland and British Columbia.

The fact that the Liberals are talking to us should not lull us into a sense that they are listening or prepared to act on our advice. The real

fear is that cynicism around electoral political action is immobilizing/demobilizing working people throughout Ontario - and beyond. We would be hard pressed at this point to rebuild the movement which led to the days of action in the late nineties. Aside from the big anti-war demos of 2003, demonstrations on issues have not been effective at changing public policy or even at attracting workers.

We have to develop a plan for government and I believe in working with the NDP to adopt policies and show leadership especially in the area of fighting privatization. I think most of us on the left are a bit too jaded to be disappointed with liberals. We didn't expect much from the liberals. However we are not optimistic enough to form a new socialist party. Perhaps we should expect more from ourselves. The question remains: what we are prepared to do today to build workers' power? **R**

Wanting Results for Ontario Poor

Greg Albo and Kim Fry

In just a year, everything seems to have changed in Ontario politics. The bullying pulpit toward the poor, unions and many others that the Tories under Premier Mike Harris had turned Queen's Park seems already a distant nightmare. The 21 percent cut in social assistance rates introduced in 1995, followed by a cut in Ontario tax rates of 30 percent the next, starkly symbolized the Tory political agenda of dividing the citizens of Ontario against one another. Fiscal restraint meant punitive austerity: the provinces' workers and poor would pay for restoring balanced budgets.

The Liberal party of Dalton McGuinty promised an end to social divisiveness. He would reunite Ontario, and return to the policies of social inclusion that had once typified the province's politics. McGuinty's victory was based on the widespread sense of the electorate that the Harris-Eves gov-

ernments were too extreme. The Liberals would restore social programmes that the Tories had decimated. In government, the Liberals have re-conjured up the ghosts of social partnership, consultations, and community hearings of the Peterson and Rae years. But they have offered little more. Indeed, the Government's fall 2004 report card on its first year in office, *Getting Results for Ontario*, is completely silent on any social policy measures to address poverty. The shortsighted decision to sign a pact with the devil that is the Ontario Taxpayer's Federation on constraining taxes has made it impossible to square this pledge with the promises to end the cutbacks to Ontario public services or address the burgeoning social divide. It should come as no surprise at all that one year later Finance Minister Greg Sorbara has been bracing citizens of Ontario for another round of government cut-

backs. So far cuts of some \$1.3 billion have been announced, with a flat-lining of expenditures across most ministries. McGuinty's Liberals only seem to suggest that we all should now share austerity in order to pay for what are now so clearly the unviable tax cuts of Harris and ill-thought tax pledges of McGuinty.

The policies the McGuinty government has directed toward the working poor and social assistance recipients illustrate how deep the social policy failure is in Ontario. In the May 2004 Budget, the Liberal government announced a mere 3 percent increase for social assistance in the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programme as of March 2005. A single person on welfare will gain just under \$16 per month to raise their monthly rate to \$536. Yet, the average monthly rent for a bachelor apartment in Ontario is \$650 per month! →

A single disabled person in Ontario currently receives \$930 per month. A 3 percent increase will mean only an additional \$28. The government at last has seen fit to lift the odious lifetime on welfare, if a person is convicted of fraud (belatedly restoring some sense of natural justice). In February 2004, the hourly minimum wage was raised from \$6.85 to \$7.15, and will then be raised by a mere 30 cents per hour per year after that. After being frozen since 1995, the increase will not even meet the increase of inflation over this period! The almost 200 thousand minimum wage workers in Ontario will at best earn only \$1084 a month before taxes for a 35 hour work-week. These measures will do little to move the one in seven people in Ontario out of poverty, or improve the lot of the one in four low-paid workers making poverty wages. Meanwhile, the regressive health premium that has been implemented adds to the tax imbalances; the government flirts with massive contracting-out of unionized work to cut wage costs and add to the numbers of low-paid in Ontario; and tuition fees can safely be predicted to be going up as the Rae Commission on higher education reports.

Certainly, there are broader causes to poverty than simply the public policies adopted by the provincial government. Unemployment and poverty are a characteristic of capitalist for a long time, as Marx explained long ago in writing about the reserve army of unemployed necessary for capitalist accumulation. The current problems of poverty and social polarisation have been growing since at least the 1980s when warnings of the impact of neoliberal policies first began to be sounded around Queen's Park. Policies of fiscal austerity and tax cuts at other levels of government have also

done their bit. Apart from some improvement in pensions, the Federal government has not addressed poverty at all since the 1970s, and the sting of the Martin budgetary and tax cuts of the mid-90s are still being felt in the massive fiscal imbalances of the federation.

But this hardly excuses the McGuinty government. There are several immediate modest steps that the government could undertake to ensure 'living wages' for the citizens of Ontario. Social assistance rates need to

wages—low productivity that plagues Ontario business. Families on social assistance would benefit directly and immediately by the government ending the clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement. The policies of the Ontario government here directly contradict Federal government objectives, and cost a family with one child on social assistance \$1463 per year. Finally, study after study suggests that low income workers have the most to gain from unionization in improving living standards. Unionization has

been central to success in reducing the numbers of low paid workers. The government could take any number of legislative measures that would improve conditions for union organizing in Ontario without spending a penny. This would particularly help in the low-paid service sector ghettos that have come to dominate the job market.

In dozens of cities across Ontario over the winter, anti-poverty activists, unionists and community workers have been out in support of such measures in the Ontario Needs A Raise Campaign. These small steps in the direction of living wages in Ontario will not end the poverty that liberal markets produce. But they will help. It would be a far better usage of society's resources than the tax cuts that have supported the corporate excesses of Conrad

Black and the many other private extravagances of the last decades of neoliberalism. This is the real choice that confronts Ontario Finance Minister Greg Sorbara in the Liberal's second year in office: to adopt a spirit of social justice and address poverty in Ontario, or to continue with the same tax and fiscal cuts that have left the enormous social deficit that plagues the province from the St Lawrence Islands to Fort Frances.



be substantially raised to reflect the real cost of living and indexed thereafter to account for increases in inflation and costs. This would do an enormous amount for single parents, the disabled and others to improve their livelihood and life chances. Similarly raising the minimum wage to \$10 and then indexing would aid low income workers in Ontario, giving them a greater chance to raise their skills. It would also begin to address the vicious circle of low

The Work Ethic

Jay Johnston

Who Are You?

When I look around at myself and my co-workers, I sometimes wonder who we are? We don't look much like the steel workers I grew up with in the Sault; we don't look like the auto workers in the black and white photos hanging in the halls at Port Elgin. When I listen to my co-workers on the line I don't hear typical blue collar banter. I hear people discussing how their stocks are doing, their new summer home, or which golf course they're going to join. We've come a long way. A couple both working at a 'big three plant' and dipping into the over-time could make over \$200,000 this year. That success is a credit to our union. It also has its down side.

As we move into nicer neighbourhoods it's easy to start believing that we have more in common with the professional down the street than a worker at a parts supplier, making ten dollars an hour, two blocks away. We start to feel closer to our supervisor than the poor slob making minimum wage at some Mc-Wal-Mart job.

It's important to remember where we came from. If we don't want to go back, it's vital that we know how we got where we are.

At one time a bunch of workers tired of having nothing, and having nothing to lose, decided to stick together and demand more. They learned that if they all stuck together, they had the power to make their bosses listen to them. Everything we have today as unionized workers came from someone's previous struggle.

Today we still have that power. In order to use it we have to learn to think like workers. The first step to thinking like workers is realizing our power is collective. One worker has no power, a plant full of workers acting as one has enormous power. This also means when we decide on our actions, we decide based on what's best for all, not ourselves or an elite few.

Thinking like a worker means realizing that our view of the world is different than managements. We know that

nothing gets built without us, we're the only people in the plant that do 'value added' work. From management's perspective we're a cost, something to be minimized. All the equipment in the place is an asset, we're an expense. In order to make good decisions as a union we always have to remember to look at the world from a workers perspective. It's very easy for the company to argue that we're something they don't need or can't afford. We on the other hand, know they don't build cars.

Companies will always claim that they need to be more competitive. That's true from their perspective, but a dangerous way for unions to look at things. If we give something up for a competitive edge then our competitors union will have to give up something more to compete. Pretty soon you have a vicious race to the bottom. When you think like a worker, you work together to strengthen all unions so that you don't compete against each other.

If you get tricked into the competitive game, you'll never win because more is never enough. If a company has a good year that means they have to do even better next year. As unions we have to be a counter-balance, a voice that points out the absurdity of a non-sustainable system.

As individual workers we have to stick together

even if we're sometimes inconvenienced personally. Thinking like a worker means knowing when to draw the line as far as helping the company out. We all know we can win favour from our boss by doing those little extras, but we give up our collective power when we do that. It's not a case of being petty or lazy; it's a case of keeping our co-worker from being the next cost saver of the day.

Thinking like a worker means realizing we can never be partners with management. At best we can be like the wolf and sheepdog in those old bugs bunny cartoons and shake hands at the end of the day. That's the beauty of the wolf and the sheepdog, they know who they are. **R**



Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge

Seattle at Five:

The Future of Labour and the Global Justice Movement

Bill Fletcher, Jr.

Organized labour in the USA has had difficulty interacting with the global justice movement not so much because these are different sectors with different traditions—though that is certainly a factor—but because there is no strategic agreement on the nature of the enemy. While there are many critical remarks I can make about the global justice movement, I would rather focus on the challenges facing organized labor in addressing not simply the global justice movement, but also the issue of global justice as such.

To the credit of organized labour in the USA, beginning with the Seattle WTO demonstrations, greater attention was paid to what can broadly be defined as global justice than had in the past. The specific focus, however, was on trade related issues and their impact on the USA. The growing interest in the global justice movement—by which I mean those forces united in their opposition to neo-liberal globalization—stumbled when the AFL-CIO chose to mount a campaign against China's inclusion in the WTO. I believe that this campaign was a mistake in many ways, not the least of which is that the focus of the campaign was, by definition, on China being the problem. It is not the principal problem. The problem is the WTO; the trade regime of which it is a part; and the manner in which global capitalism is restructuring itself (and this latter point is actually the essence of what we call “globalization”), an issue with which US organized labor had difficulty grasping.

In fact, earlier, in the days leading up to the Seattle demonstrations, the notion of challenging the existence and *raison d'être* of the WTO was ridiculed internally within the AFL-CIO by some senior staff people who alleged that since the planet needs a mecha-

nism for regulating trade, the WTO is what is on the table (and therefore, we must reform it). That the WTO was a Clinton-supported project presented apparent difficulties for many union leaders, fearing that open opposition to the WTO would mean undercutting our alleged friend in the White House. Few people wanted to acknowledge that the WTO was as rotten in its essence as raw meat sitting in the hot sun.

At the same time and in a more progressive direction, in 2000 the AFL-CIO and some of its affiliates became increasingly interested in educating their members to some of the issues of global justice. Elements of what had been called the “Common Sense Economics Education Program” (originated in 1997) were utilized in order to create a union member-oriented “global fairness” education effort. There were two problems that emerged: one, as with Common Sense Economics, there was and remains a faltering commitment both within the AFL-CIO and most of its affiliates to develop and fully operationalize a comprehensive educational effort. This is something that haunts the US trade union movement. The trade union movement often confuses education with information provision and does not realize what is necessary if we truly wish to interact with our members on the questions of ideas and analyses.

The second problem was that the conceptualization of global justice and global fairness by the trade union movement was somewhat restricted to concerning ourselves with the activities of multi-national corporations and trade agreements. While this is certainly part of neo-liberal globalization, it is not the whole story. This became much clearer in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks

and the response of most of US organized labor to them.

In the wake of 11 September there was a tendency in the US trade union movement to revert to what I would call a World War II paradigm, i.e., to assume that national unity could be built in response to the crisis. There seemed to be the expectation that Bush would change his spots and recognize the importance of workers and unions and refrain from his war of annihilation against trade unions. Things did not work out that way. Instead he chose to wage a war on two fronts, so to speak.

What I believe to be the deeper problem, however, is that the US trade union movement is and has been caught in a ferocious bind. This movement, over the last 120 years, has developed within the context of a capitalist country which has imperial ambitions. Those imperial ambitions have translated into foreign policy adventures, most of which have either been justified by the US government in the name of patriotism, or justified as being in the defense of US lives and property. With certain exceptions, the official trade union movement, as opposed to, let's say, the Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies), tended to support US foreign policy almost without question as an expression of what it believed to be its patriotic duty. It also encouraged a disconnect between this foreign policy and the actions and plans of US corporations. Ironically, in some cases the officialdom of organized labor did not disconnect this linkage but saw that linkage as positive.

During the Cold War, support for US foreign policy was again seen as a patriotic step. Yet, with the various actions of the AFL-CIO in particular, but most of organized labour generally, the credibility of US organized labour came to be questioned. To the

extent to which the AFL-CIO (and I am using this to reference the officialdom of US organized labor since most unions supported the policies of the institution known as the AFL-CIO) supported or assisted in coups and disruptions, such as British Guiana in 1964, Chile in 1973, and mischief in South Africa during the 1980s, it was seen around the world, not as an expression of the interests of the US working class, but rather an arm of the US state, thus the notion of the AFL-CIA (a reference often heard in the global South when speaking of the “old days”).

So, let me summarize at least part of the problem: organized labour in the USA has refused to acknowledge, or in the worst cases has supported, the imperial ambitions of the USA. This is now all coming home to haunt us, resulting in our inability to distinguish within our ranks and in the broad front against neo-liberal globalization, right-wing populism from progressive sentiment; our movement has a partial and inconsistent response to neo-liberal globalization itself; and we

have witnessed a strategic paralysis within organized labor with regard to responding to the specifics of US foreign policy.

Let me specify this a bit more. Our movement has been unable to speak with our members about how to understand the connections between US foreign policy and the growth of the multinational corporations. It is not just about treaties that Clinton, Bush or anyone else has signed. It is, as well, about wars that have been fought. It is about the steps that the US has taken to clear the ground, as if with a political Daisycutter, of all opposition to

neo-liberal globalization.

In order for the union movement to understand the question of global justice, we have to understand the problem of empire, or if you prefer, imperial ambitions. There is simply no way to avoid it, particularly in today’s world. The reason? One, we are living in a world where the corporate/government connections are strengthening, and with them increased repression of progressive and democratic forces in the face of unfolding globalization. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the imperial ambitions of the USA have become more blatant as the US



Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge

attempts to lead or direct the reorganization of global capitalism. That reorganization is linked not only to trade deals, but also to changes in the production process, wealth polarization on a global scale, and, as noted, repression in order to enforce neo-liberal globalization. It is in that light that we can better understand initiatives such as so-called USAPatriot Act, and other measures which infringe on our civil liberties and basic democratic rights.

Two, there was a period in time when sections of US capital saw in the official US trade union movement a possible partner, or at the least, an irritant that had to be mollified. The US

trade union movement was, for instance, useful in opposing left-wing labour movements around the world. After all, it had credentials.

Social peace on the basis of some level of a modus vivendi between capital and organized labour was needed not only in the USA, but also around the world. There were also sections of capital that recognized that trade unions were useful in terms of keeping other sections of capital “honest,” so to speak, that is keeping wages out of capitalist competition.

That day is gone. We should have no illusions about that. We are as useless to capital and the US state as a bicycle is to a fish, to borrow from an old feminist expression.

But, here is the challenge: when one has built a movement on the basis of an incorrect assessment of reality, and based on the provision of incomplete and often inaccurate information to its members and supporters, it becomes problematic to shift gears. How does one do it? How does one explain new alliances, such as with the so-called “Turtles?” How does one explain

that those we condemned overseas a decade or more ago, we now must embrace, whereas those we supported have often turned out to be our staunchest opponents? How do we explain the lack of patriotism, for lack of another term, of US capital in abandoning the US worker, and the policies of naked aggression and implied genocide that this same US capital encourages in US foreign policy? How do we reply to the questions that I constantly heard when we delivered the Common Sense Economics education program during the 1990s? Participants would respond very favorably to the train-the-trainers, and the workshops themselves, →

but they would inevitably ask the following: "Can we get more of this?" That is a great question, and one that an educator always wants to hear. They would also ask: "Why did we not know this before?" The answer to that latter question goes to the heart of the history and culture of organized labour in the USA.

What is needed within US organized labour is an understanding of how other trade union movements (and other social movements more generally) outside of the US understand the workings of US foreign policy and its implications. This is a very difficult discussion because it runs up against the assumptions upon which the US trade union movement has been built. It is an uncomfortable discussion because it additionally challenges the way we think of ourselves and how we think that we are viewed by the outside world. Nevertheless, it is a discussion that must take place otherwise there will be no international solidarity.

The second point is that we must fuse the discussion of global justice-as-anti-multi-national corporation, with global justice as anti-empire, and specifically, with a critical examination of US foreign policy. This will be especially difficult because it forces us to examine the manner in which the conception of patriotism has been manipulated by both capital and political elites in order to advance their unsavory business. It also forces us to examine how we have been played for chumps.

Let's look, for instance, at Iraq.

We were sold a bill of goods. The allegations of weapons of mass destruction and imminent threats were lies, pure and simple. The desire to invade Iraq dated back at least till 1992, and it has subsequently been revealed that prior to 9/11 planning was underway for an invasion of Iraq. The only thing that was lacking was the pretext. 9/11 was the pretext.

Although the AFL-CIO raised questions about the war, somewhat late in the game, once the war started the

AFL-CIO felt compelled to issue a statement supporting the troops, and by implication, supporting the war. Yet, in the manner in which its statement read, the notion of supporting the troops was identified with our patriotic duty, thus, the AFL-CIO fell into the trap that supporting the troops means supporting the war.

For the Bush administration to suggest - and for the US trade union movement to implicitly accept - that those of us who opposed and continue to oppose the war are not supporting the troops is the height of insult. The notion that we should shut our mouths because the troops have been deployed is ludicrous. We who opposed the war support the troops; that's why we want to have them brought home.

But a trade union activist broke this all down for me shortly before the war actually started. I had been explaining my position on the war and he said, "Bill, look at it this way. If you have a son or daughter who is in a gang and that gang engages in some sort of illegal activity, does your concern about your son or daughter mean that you support the illegal activity? Not at all! Instead, you want your son or daughter out of that illegal activity; out of harm's way."

The invasion of Iraq was as illegal as the day is long, and the US military is being used as a gang by the powers-at-be, to borrow from the terminology used by the former Marine Corp general and two time Medal of Honor winner, Smedley Butler. Yet the trade union movement has been all-too-cautious about calling things as they are. Can we look forward to the day when our movement will even entertain a discussion where the opinion you are about to hear - that of General Butler - is verbalized?

Let me quote of few of his words on his own experience and analysis:

"War is just a racket. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of people. Only a small inside group knows what it is about. It is

conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses. . . .

There isn't a trick in the racketeering bag that the military gang is blind to. It has its "finger men" to point out enemies, its "muscle men" to destroy enemies, its "brain men" to plan war preparations, and a "Big Boss" Super-Nationalistic-Capitalism. It may seem odd for me, a military man to adopt such a comparison. Truthfulness compels me to. I spent thirty- three years and four months in active military service as a member of this country's most agile military force, the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks from Second Lieutenant to Major-General. And during that period, I spent most of my time being a high class muscle-man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I suspected I was just part of a racket at the time. Now I am sure of it. Like all the members of the military profession, I never had a thought of my own until I left the service. My mental faculties remained in suspended animation while I obeyed the orders of higher-ups. This is typical with everyone in the military service.

I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912 (where have I heard that name before?). I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.

During those years, I had, as the boys in the back room would say, a swell racket. Looking back on it, I feel that I could have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents."

Organized labour in the USA



has been held in check by the manner in which it has interpreted patriotism and by its failure to critically evaluate US foreign policy. Thus, we have on the one hand the surprise and support that greeted AFL-CIO President John Sweeney at the 2000 ICFTU World Congress in Durban, South Africa with his strong denunciation of neo-liberal globalization, but our inability, on the other hand, to speak with our members about the nature of US foreign policy and the difference between patriotism vs. culpability in a crime.

Is there any hope? The answer is "yes," but it depends entirely on the willingness and ability of the US trade union movement to cross a line into what has hitherto been a forbidden zone for US trade unionism. This forbidden zone is a political space where the US trade union movement begins to look at the interconnections between multi-national corporations, US capital and US foreign policy. It is a space that begins to question the motives and actions of the US government, and particularly the role of the US government in crushing progressive social movements around the world. It is a space that dares to ask whether there is a role the US trade union movement can play, not simply in being partners with unions in other countries, but where we can be a cham-

pion of consistent democracy, both in the USA, as well as globally. Consistent democracy, it should be said, is the real core of a genuine global justice movement. And that global justice movement desperately needs organized labor advancing a program of international solidarity against neo-liberal globalization.

Let me conclude with a word on a word: "solidarity." I have been recently informed that there are some unions that no longer use this word. They apparently believe that it is antiquated and unrecognized by their members, and, therefore, it should be dropped from trade union lexicon in favor of the word "unity." While I have no problem with the word "unity," I believe that expunging the word "solidarity" is a major mistake, and interestingly enough, relates to today's discussion. "Solidarity" conveys something akin to "unity" but not necessarily the same thing. "Unity" often assumes a similar context or environment. The beauty of the word and concept of "solidarity" is that it suggests the active bridging of the gap between the unfamiliar. In that sense solidarity is in some respects a step toward a higher level of unity.

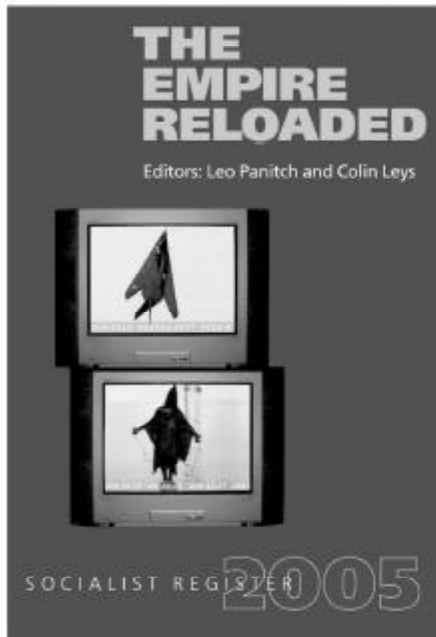
Some may think of solidarity as something rhetorical. I believe that the late leader of Mozam-

bique, Samora Machel put it best: "Solidarity is not charity, but mutual aid in pursuit of shared objectives." Shared objectives.

Solidarity is addressing the process of bridging that gap between whatever the unfamiliar may be, whether geography, industry, race, ethnicity, or gender, just to use a few examples. It is a process of building a linkage where one does not currently exist; a linkage tied to a common project or opposition to a common enemy. In that sense I must respectfully disagree with some remarks offered earlier with regard to international unionism. Cross-border solidarity develops when there is mutual respect and there is no sense of one being dominated by outside forces. Solidarity means a coming together of partners "voluntarily" but with shared objectives, as suggested to us by Machel.

Thus, global unionism does not or should not be seen as resulting from the expansion of US-based so-called international unions, but rather through the creation of a new, international partnership. When thinking about renewed trade unionism and global justice, the concept of solidarity must be at the core. **R**

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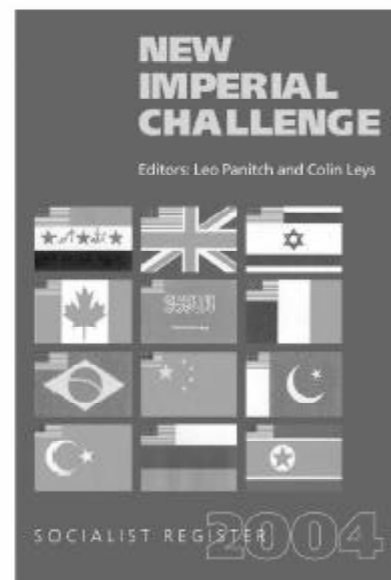
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