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RELAY

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A SOCIALIST PROJECT REVIEW



THE EMERGING EUROLEFT * DEMOCRACY & IMPERIALISM
CANADA IN AFGHANISTAN * HOTEL WORKERS RISING
REPORT FROM THE ZAPATISTA'S TOUR

\$3



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

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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.

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The Harper Government: Towards A New Social Order?

Ann Porter

The election of Stephen Harper's Conservative government on January 23 has significantly shifted the terms of the social policy debate in Canada. While in some respects the Harper government represents a continuation of the market-based neoliberal trajectory that has been set over the last 20 some years, in other respects it represents a turn of a kind that we haven't seen before at the federal level in Canada. Many aspects of the Conservative agenda are likely to alter both the framework and nature of social policy discussions. This ranges from specific program proposals in areas such as childcare and healthcare, to the federal-provincial decentralization agenda; from proposals to enshrine property rights in the constitution, to changes in the process of Supreme Court judge selection that could have long run implications for court challenges and equality-based claims. Of particular concern, however, and permeating through specific policy proposals, is a reformulation of what the "social" itself means, both in terms of how we understand the role and nature of "social" policy, and more fundamentally, how we do or should constitute ourselves as social beings.

THE CONSERVATIVE ELECTION PLATFORM

In the Conservative Party election platform issues to do with healthcare, childcare, "security" for seniors, post-secondary education, as well as same-sex marriage, all fell under the rubric "Stand up for Families." Significant in the Conservative platform was the *absence* of any notion of "the social" in a broad, communitarian sense; in the sense of building "social foundations," as the Liberals have recently tended to call it, and certainly in the sense of encouraging a collective or social solidarity. Indeed what was striking was the apparent *erasure* of the very notion of "social policy" itself. What is left is simply a policy for (traditionally defined) families and individuals; an emphasis on increased familial and self-reliance rather than reliance on the state for issues that fall in the category of the "social."

The Conservative election platform reflected both a neoliberal, market-based approach and, despite efforts to keep a moderate tone, strong elements of a social conservative agenda. This is likely to mean a continued shift *both* from the state to the market *and* from the state to the family; a reconfiguration of what are public goods and what are private goods and responsibilities in both these ways. This double tendency can be seen in two of the

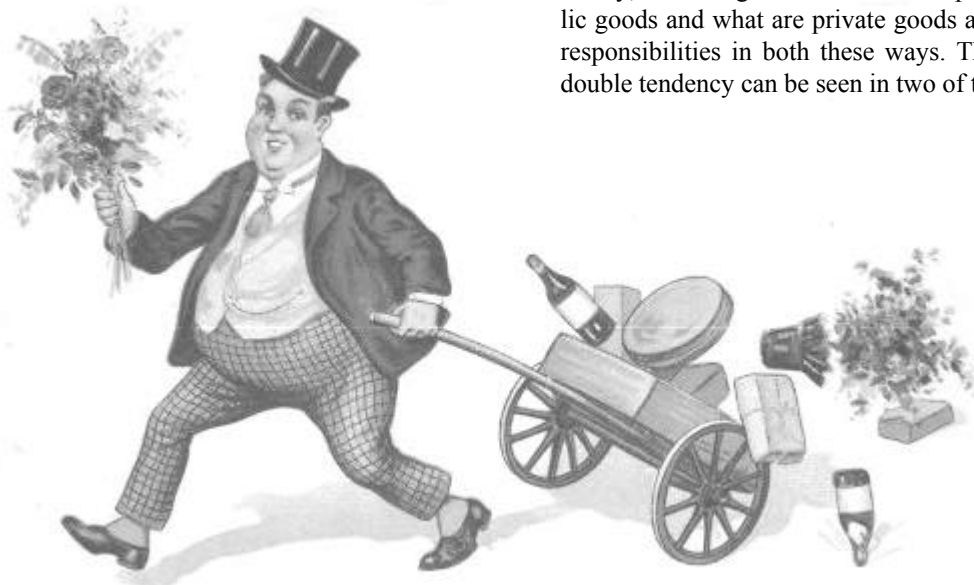
major pronouncements in social policy areas.

CHILDCARE

Childcare became a major issue during the election. The Conservatives promised to rescind the bilateral agreements that the Liberal government had signed with the ten provinces and to withdraw from what appeared, at last, to be some form of publicly funded childcare at the federal level. The Conservatives argued that whereas the Liberals and NDP would "build a massive childcare bureaucracy" their approach has to do with choice: that "the best role for government is to let parents choose what's best for their children ... whether that means formal child care, informal care through neighbours or relatives, or a parent staying at home." The *Conservative alternative, the Choice in Childcare Allowance*, is to provide all families with a taxable \$1,200 allowance per year for each child under six. In addition, the Conservatives have promised to allocate \$250 million a year in tax credits to employers to help create childcare spaces. These measures, however, in no sense constitute a childcare plan. The former is essentially a form of family allowance that has little directly to do with childcare; the latter provides a limited amount of funds to cover capital costs, but not the ongoing expenses involved in operating a childcare centre. Most importantly for the social conservatives, it provides the option of increased state funding to support the stay-at-home parent.

HEALTHCARE

With respect to health care, the Conservatives have emphasized reducing wait-times and have promised to work with the provinces to develop a Patient Wait Times Guarantee to "ensure that all Canadians receive essential medical treatment within



clinically acceptable waiting times.” At the same time, they have signaled that they would allow for a mix of public and private healthcare delivery. This, it seems, is the real issue. Highlighting the need to reduce “wait times” has become a rational for allowing private healthcare delivery.

A NEW SOCIAL ORDER

Governments over the last 15 to 20 years have already moved well along the path of downloading responsibility for “the social” away from the state and towards markets and families. The qualitatively new dimension that the Harper government brings, however, is a new prominence given to a social conservative ideology. The apparent erasure of “the social” in Conservative party documents is, of course, something of an illusion. It is not simply a vacuum that is being left in terms of the role of the state in encouraging a particular social framework, or in shaping social relations, and the way we interact with each other. Rather, there is a particular *type* of morality and social order that is being promoted; one that incorporates notions of the “right” type of family, a particular type of religious value, a law and order agenda and the removal of rights with respect to same-sex marriage and reproductive choice.

Some commentators have suggested that Harper is not himself a social conservative and that the party as a whole, in part through the need to appeal to a broader electorate, has become more moderate. While Harper’s political strategy may require proceeding cautiously with a social conservative agenda, the ties to and pressures from this contingent need to be taken seriously: there can be no doubt that the election of the Harper government is giving social conservative elements a presence that they haven’t had before. Harper’s roots in the Reform/Alliance Party, his time spent at the head of the National Citizen’s Coalition and his close relationship to Tom Flanagan are all reminders of Harper’s own personal history. His past pronouncements similarly suggest, at the very least, a close engagement with social conservative elements of the party. (In a telling article in 2003, for example, he argued that since the economic agenda is now

taken care of, what really needs to be addressed is the “social agenda of the modern left,” particularly the welfare state and the damage that is having on institutions such as the family.)

Beyond Harper’s personal views and history, pressure to move forward on a social conservative agenda also results from the alliances and forces that form key elements within the Conservative party as a whole. The increased presence of the religious right and its influence on and ties to various Conservative party members is of particular concern. While traditionally the religious right has had less of a presence in Canada than in the U.S., its influence here appears to be growing. A number of Conservative candidates were nominated with the help of Christian leaders and a growing number of evangelicals ran in the election. The organization *Egale* identified 34 first-time Conservative candidates as closely identified with the Christian right. Ten of these were elected. Some ten cabinet members have been identified as social conservatives, including Vic Toews (Attorney General and Minister of Justice), Stockwell Day (Public Safety) and Jim Flaherty (Finance). Other Conservatives with ties to the Christian right include David Sweet (former head of Promise Keepers Canada); and Maurice Vellacott, (with ties to Focus on the Family Canada). An increasing number of evangelical lobby groups, grassroots organizations and educational institutions have also established a presence in Ottawa. Many of these have links to groups in the U.S. and have considerable influence with Conservative party members.

IMPLEMENTING THE SOCIAL CONSERVATIVE AGENDA

The social conservative influence can already be seen in a number of policy areas.

As noted above, Conservative childcare proposals are formulated in a way that accommodates those who favour a traditional family and stay-at-home solutions. In addition, the social conservative agenda calls into question what were thought to be acquired rights with respect to individual choice in the area of household formation, sexuality and reproduction.

The Conservatives have promised to hold a free vote on the definition of marriage, and if it passes, to introduce legislation “to restore the traditional definition of marriage while respecting existing same-sex marriages.” A *Globe and Mail* survey found that 136 of the incoming MPs indicated that they are opposed to same-sex marriage, while 153 support it. There is, therefore, a very solid bloc opposing same-sex marriage and a vote on the issue would be close. Women’s groups are also concerned about the Conservative agenda with respect to abortion. During the election, Harper would only say that his views on the issue are “complex,” and that he “was not proceeding with an abortion agenda.” It has been estimated, however, that there are at least 90 anti-choice MPs in the new parliament (including 16 Liberals and 74 Conservatives) and a large number whose position is unknown. Women’s groups are also concerned that a private member’s bill could be introduced on the subject. Conservative Party policy allows for free votes on issues of conscience, so even if Harper has said he won’t proceed with an abortion agenda, the issue could nevertheless be introduced, debated and voted on. There are also other ways in which reproductive rights could be affected, including through the appointment of anti-choice ministers, possible funding cuts for services and groups that are pro-choice, and through encouraging delisting abortion as a medically necessary procedure.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEW SOCIAL AGENDA

Overall, then, in the area of social policy, the Conservative agenda involves proposals for a new type of social and economic order, one that involves not only the continuation – and probably a more aggressive continuation – of a neoliberal agenda of privatization and market-based solutions, but also the promotion of certain ways of forming the social fabric. This variant of neoliberalism isn’t just about increasing reliance on the market; it is also about intrusion into private areas of family and household life, foreclosing possibilities and (at least for a sizeable number in the Conservative bloc) imposing a narrow, religious-based morality. →

The consequences of this range of possible changes for the provision of social services – the downloading onto unpaid labour in the home, for notions of community and solidarity, for the deepening of inequalities and increased vulnerability of individuals and communities, for the ability for people to lead independent and engaged lives, and to make their own choices in critical areas of their lives – are profound. The Conservatives have advanced a discourse of “choice,” most prominently in the area of childcare. Yet many of their policies act in precisely the opposite way to limit choice and foreclose possibilities. Looking at economic, labour market and social security provisions taken as a whole, it is difficult to see how anything other than more of the low wage, precarious type of work will flourish under a Harper government and that this will be accompanied by the continued erosion of the public and broader public sector (hospitals, schools etc) that both provided more stable jobs

and the type of services needed for families, households and individuals to continue to function. The result is likely to be an acceleration of the trend to a social and economic framework defined by a combination of more precarious work, and a reduction in state provided income security, and where the choices and survival strategies available to people will be very narrow indeed.

For the left, this points to the need to understand the consequences of a market-driven agenda, but also to take seriously the increased presence of social conservatives and their ability to tap into and construct responses to the insecurities of the current era. What the Conservative platform indicates is the importance of taking into account the social, as well as the economic aspects of neoliberalism as a whole, and the importance of better understanding the multi-faceted ways in which the “relations of ruling” are currently being reconstituted. Ties to social conservative

groups in the U.S. serve to remind us that imperialism does not just involve economic and political relations of power, but also the reformulation of social relations at multiple levels. Currently Canadians do not as a whole give a lot of credibility to the tenets of social conservatism. However, the presence of such a strong current within the government does mean that issues that were thought settled 5, 10, 20 or more years ago are once again open for debate. For the left, it will require not only a re-assertion of the importance of rights, for example, in the area of reproductive choice, as well as collective rights in the areas of social and economic policy, but, in addition, further debate on the type of alternative arrangements between the economic and the social that might be possible. **R**

Ann Porter teaches feminism and political economy at York University.

Harperism: The First Three Months

Greg Albo

The opening of the 39th Parliament of Canada on April 3, 2006 quickly revealed what should now be plain to all. Under the Conservative Party leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Canadians are facing a government with an unambiguous right-wing agenda. The outlines of the ‘Harperism’ project can readily be discerned: there is a clear effort to unite all reactionary and conservative forces into a coherent governing force, most notably to bring into the fold right-wing nationalists in Québec; deeper integration with the U.S. will be pursued, initially expanding Canada’s imperialist role in military operations in Afghanistan as a component of the war strategy of the American empire, but following this up with trade and security policies to form ‘Fortress North America’; neoliberalism will be pushed further into social policy with greater market provision in such areas as healthcare and daycare and in the remaking fiscal federalism; and there will be a discursive emphasis on traditional Canadian ‘values’ as a bridge to social conservatism, religious fundamentalists of all faiths and a ‘law and order’ platform. This is far from the neoliberalism-lite of the Chrétien government, by which Canada differentiated itself from the hard right developments in the USA.

Set against a forceful and an already staggeringly arrogant Conservative Government, the opposition benches in the House of Commons look inept and desultory. The Liberals under Martin

had already moved in many of the same directions as Harper, and can still easily be rebuffed for attacking their own policies. And the ever-practical Jack Layton and the NDP seem mainly concerned with trying to pry a compromise here and there out of the government to demonstrate, more to themselves than anyone else, that their ‘third way’ is working. It cannot be avoided, but still needs saying, for many socialists in Canada are still living with the clichés and within the fractured organizations and politics of generations ago: the left is enduring a major defeat of its ideas and organizations.

HARPER’S PRIORITIES

The Speech from the Throne (the very name a noxious reminder of Canada’s backward democracy) is meant formally to transform an election manifesto into a legislative agenda. They ring of platitudes and obscure more controversial initiatives. The Throne Speech opening Harper’s maiden legislative session was no different.

As for platitudes, the Throne Speech had ample with an agenda to “clean up government, provide real support for working families and strengthen our federation as well as our role in

the world.” And, of course, that the U.S. is “our best friend and largest trading partner.” The so-called immediate ‘first five’ priorities also found their place: accountability legislation, a cut in the sales tax, tougher criminal sentencing, cash for parents for childcare, and cuts in hospital waiting-times. These have become something of a mantra for government spokespersons. Once again promises to accommodate the distinctiveness of Québec, improve conditions for Aboriginal peoples, tackle democratic reform and address environmental issues were dusted off. These will again come to naught. The only unexpected announcement was government plans to offer, at long last, an apology for the racist Chinese immigration head tax.

While the ‘first five’ priorities present a pragmatic side to the government, it is plain that a wider agenda will be pursued, occupying a great deal of attention. This was evident immediately in Harper making his first foreign trip in March a flashy visit to the Canadian troops newly deployed to southern Afghanistan. This was a symbol of both the increased prominence being given to the military, and even closer alignment of Canada with American imperialism. And in parallel to the U.S. example, opposition to the war in Canada is being characterized by Harper and the military brass as being disloyal to Canada. The meeting with Presidents Bush and Fox in Mexico in April confirmed the Conservative agenda of pursuing deeper integration with the U.S., initially around border security and migration issues. The extensive meetings with Québec Premier Jean Charest through the winter, and also with several premiers from western Canada, indicated the priority of revamping federalism via a project of further decentralism of federal government powers and national programmes. Finally, Harper has linked his plan to pay parents \$1200 a year for each preschool child to social conservatism. He is selling it as offering families a ‘choice,’ so as also to offer support for women who stay at home, and enlisting social conservatives and religious groups in the campaign over daycare policy.

CENTRALIZING POWER

Harperism, then, has a ‘first five’ agenda and a larger strategy to re-shape the Canadian political landscape. He will be ruthless in pursuing them. Many of the old planks of democratic reform Harper plied in opposition will fall to the side. This can already be seen in the first few months in office.

Against party positions for an elected Senate and against floor-crossers, Harper appointed Michel Fortier to the Senate and Cabinet, along with Liberal turncoat David Emerson. In the accountability package introduced in April, he left to the side the access to information component. In open disregard of his campaign focus on corporate lobbyists, he appointed a lobbyist for the arms industry as Minister of Defence. Overturning his own personal effort in opposition to have Commons committee chairs be elected by members, Harper appointed them all, including a clearly chauvinist MP to head up the Aboriginal Affairs Committee. And Harper has concentrated power in the Prime Minister’s Office, where policy-making is being concentrated and where all Ministers must have their public statements vetted. For example, foreign policy making is being directed out of the PMO

(and the Department of Defence) where it is shrouded in secrecy, and the role of External Affairs limited, keeping the dullard Minister Peter MacKay at bay. This catalogue of the incipient au-



thoritarian concentration of executive power and governance could easily be extended.

ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL SPACE

Harper is a determined and capable neoliberal with an agenda that is unusually clear in Canadian politics. That agenda has sparked calls from many quarters for a centre-centre alliance between the Liberals and the NDP. Both parties are, in turn, competing desperately to occupy the practical centre. The difficulty for the left is that the practical centre only offers a variation of the neoliberal order and slightly altered role for Canada in the American empire.

Alternative campaigns will have to be built to open up new political spaces. One opening is in the campaigns against market provision of healthcare and daycare in favour of universal public programmes. Many municipalities being prodded by public campaigns are increasingly turning away from private sector led P3 funding of hospitals for their additional expense. Similarly, the withdrawal by the Conservatives from daycare funding agreements announced by the previous government for his market-based approach is sparking a concerted campaign of opposition. A second is the general public antipathy to Canada’s imperialist adventures in the Middle East, from the troop deployment in combat roles in Afghanistan under U.S. command to the sickeningly one-sided support of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the immediate cutting of funding to newly elected Hamas government of the Palestinian Authority.

These political spaces are where popular campaigns can do considerable damage to the project of Harperism. It is also what is necessary to defeat neoliberalism, which turfing out the bloody-minded Stephen Harper alone will not do. **R**

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Capitalist Democracy and Voting System Reform in Canada

Denis Pilon

Western capitalist democracies are currently undergoing their most serious institutional overhaul since their inauguration roughly a century ago. Across the globe, country after country is considering reforms to legislative rules and procedures, franchise laws, and, perhaps most surprisingly, the voting system itself. Canada has proven no exception to this trend. Over the past five years different levels of Canadian government have offered all sorts of new ways of doing things: limits on union and corporate financing of politics, fixed election dates, increases in non-partisan oversight of politicians by auditors or new independent officers of legislatures, and much else.

Voting system reform has also taken off, with serious discussion in half the provinces and at the federal level. British Columbia and Prince Edward Island have held public votes on proportional representation (PR) voting systems already, Québec continues to debate moving toward a semi-PR system, Ontario just announced the creation of a Citizens' Assembly to examine the provincial method of election, while the Harper government's recent Throne Speech promised to examine "the challenges facing Canada's electoral system and democratic institutions." And interest appears to span the political spectrum, propelled by Conservative governments in PEI and New Brunswick, Liberal administrations in Ontario, BC, and Québec, and the NDP at the federal level. Fixing democracy appears to have become an apolitical 'consensus' issue in Canada and elsewhere—everyone seems to be for it and few politicians speak out against it. But beneath the surface of all this consensus quite different interests are at work, reflecting the continuing tension inherent in this specifically capitalist form of 'democracy.' Looking a bit closer at the various reform contexts provides insight into this tension and why PR and other reforms are on the agenda.

WHY VOTING SYSTEM REFORM?

The recent attention to the voting system is unusual and more than a bit curious. It had long been held by politicians and political analysts that voting systems were nearly impossible to change. As the opening in the political system by which individuals or parties would gain legislative and state power, voting systems were typically designed by those with power to make sure power stayed in their hands. And as only the winners could introduce any change to the voting system, and they had won under the existing rules, change wasn't really in their interest. This view has some historical support—between 1920 and 1993 only one western country changed its voting system. But since 1993, voting systems have been under challenge, with success-

ful reforms introduced in New Zealand, Italy and Japan. As in Canada, analysts highlight general trends of public disaffection from politics and falling voter turnout as contributing to the reform process, but the partisan divisions on the issue in those other countries also highlighted the different interests at work.

Basically, recent international voting system reforms emerged out of a complicated struggle to entrench or resist neoliberalism as the reigning regulatory paradigm of modern capitalism. In Japan, it represented a struggle over the future of the 'Japan Inc.' form of state-led capitalist development supported by the socialists and parts of the Liberal Democrat coalition and opposed by new neoliberal factions of the ruling party and smaller players. In New Zealand, voting system reform emerged as a form of resistance to the neoliberal capture of both major left and right parties in the 1980s and 1990s. And in Italy, the issue was also driven by efforts to break the clientelist links keeping the country from a 'proper' neoliberal integration with Europe. Interestingly, the direction of voting system reform was not uniform: while Japan and New Zealand moved towards, Italy moved away from proportional voting.

Entrenching neoliberalism proved less difficult in Canada than these other countries and can hardly be credited with requiring voting system reform to accomplish its goals. Begun in the last days of the 1980s federal Liberal administration, given structure with the Conservative free trade agreements, and solidified by another decade of Liberal national rule, by 2000 neoliberalism had become an all-party creed with NDP provincial governments also embracing it. But neoliberalism has contributed to the increase in democratic reform debate indirectly. As it necessarily undermines the fiscal basis of the welfare state, the public has become more and more unhappy with political outcomes, contributing to declining levels of confidence in politics and politicians and an opening for calls for institutional reforms.

Of course, for mainstream commentators the rising levels of public discontent with politics bears no relation to neoliberal reform. Instead, changing public views are credited to an increase in post-material values or a 'decline of deference.' For the media, given that they too obfuscate the defining role of neoliberalism in contemporary politics, the current reform initiatives are simply government, policy wonk, and citizen responses to falling voter turnout and declining levels of public interest in politics, particularly among youth. Yet, civic engagement is an issue everywhere in Canada but voting system reform is not. What is absent from such arguments is the strategic interests of political parties, and their crucial role in why reform is or is not

seeming to move forward.

THE PARTIES & PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Looking at what the parties may want gives us some insight into what is going on across the provinces. The Québec Liberals have pushed a mildly proportional change to the provincial voting system primarily because the party is structurally disadvantaged by the current system. Liberal votes are too concentrated geographically, leading them to often win fewer seats than the PQ with similar levels of support. Not surprisingly, the model being touted by the government has been designed to address their specific political problems; there is little chance it will benefit new or smaller parties or do much to further women or visible minority representation. In Ontario and BC, Liberal governments had made voting system reform an issue while in opposition as a kind of emergency back up plan. Both parties have struggled to get into power and thought voting system reform might be a necessary issue if they lost again. But once in power their interest in the issue, not surprisingly, cooled considerably.

However, given that public interest in the question existed and the provincial NDP parties were on record in favour of change, neither government could ignore their campaign promises. Instead, both struck Citizens' Assemblies to debate and possibly recommend an alternative voting system that would be the subject of a referendum. But with change requiring a super-majority to pass, it seemed clear that the governments hoped any alternative would fail. In the Atlantic provinces, voting system reform was sparked by a series of election results where opposition parties were either very poorly represented or not represented at all. As such parties typically had gained 30-40% of the vote, the results appeared absurd and threatened the legitimacy of the outcome. Governments were looking for some mild form of proportionality that would allow opposition to gain representation without preventing the leading parties from gaining the exaggerated majorities that the current system tends to produce. But when government-sponsored commissions returned reports with more radically proportional proposals, they were either killed via a manipulated public process (PEI) or shelved (NB).

It is interesting to note from the recent provincial experience that where parties saw voting system reform as in their interest, they kept tight control over the process, as in Quebec. Where they were less interested or, indeed, may have wanted the process to fail, the issue was farmed out to commissions and citizen participation. Meanwhile, in the rest of the provinces the issue has not emerged because no potentially governing party is interested, whether left or right. Nor is much progress being made or likely at the federal level where the new unity on the right has left only the NDP keen on change. And if it were not for the existence of a minority government, discussion at the federal level would quickly peter out altogether.

Luckily, despite what parties in government may want strategically, sometimes an issue gets away from them. Though it seemed clear that the BC Liberals hoped the Citizens' Assembly (CA) would recommend little change or have their conclusions

ignored by a public little interested in the technical details of voting, the CA's STV model gained almost 58% of the popular vote in the election day referendum on the system. The result created a problem for the government as they had set a 60% threshold for the referendum vote to win yet their own victory was far less compelling – they garnered just 45% of the popular vote. Now the government has promised yet another vote on the issue in 2008. Similar unpredictable events might open up space for reform in other places too. For instance, the united right in Canada is still an unstable entity whose social conservative wing may yet push the party back to the sidelines at the federal level. These divisions within the right may become an opportunity to push for serious voting system reform.

THE LEFT AND VOTING SYSTEM REFORM

Despite these recent manipulations of the issue, voting system reform remains a pressing issue for progressive forces in Canada. To the extent that our mobilizing can have effect in contesting the democratic space in capitalist democracy, more proportional voting systems may make governing coalitions more responsive to our efforts. A PR system would end the practice of one-party phony majority governments and better represent the ideological and social diversity of the country. But these are just possibilities – results would crucially depend on what we do. Of course, if PR is so good for the left why do some on the right also support it? Well, not unlike many on the left, there are many on the right, specifically social conservatives, who feel that media are biased against them and that the majority of the country would embrace their politics if only the bias of media and political elites could be overcome. Thus they see PR as a way to make their now marginalized politics more visible. On the issue then progressives may find themselves in curious company.

On the whole, despite some right wing support for change, the economic right that dominate the Conservative and Liberal parties (and increasingly the NDP too), as well as all aspects of the mainstream media, are opposed to more proportional voting for obvious reasons – it may make visible the very thing they are always trying to cover up – that modern capitalism is not working for the world's working classes. If a move to PR will end the typical unresponsive 'elected dictatorships' that result from our present system, increase our points of pressure through public mobilizing, and make visible anti-capitalist politics by allowing new parties to emerge, then it is worthy of a claim on our limited social and organizational resources. Despite efforts to rig the current considerations of voting system reform in various locales, there are openings within them all to be exploited. Particularly if a wider public debate can emerge, it will become more and more difficult to defend our current unrepresentative and unaccountable ways of doing things. **R**

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Who's Getting It?

The Canadian Mission in Afghanistan

Richard Harding

Since relieving American forces in Kandahar on 28 February 2006, Canada's casualties in Afghanistan have come from a suicide bombing, an Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) accident, an axe attack on a soldier, and a killing by apparently friendly fire. There have also been dozens of casualties from both firefights and troop movements in hostile terrain. In the wake of these casualties, about half of Canadians display unease with Operation Archer – the code name for Canada's growing commitment to the U.S. led mission in Afghanistan – as recorded in polls through April. According to the Canadian media and political elites, Canadians aren't 'getting it': the 9/11 assault on the Twin Towers was also an attack on Canada; Canadian security needs the mission to prevent terrorist assaults on Canada, and Osama Bin Laden has named Canada; and Canada is engaged in the heroic cause of bringing democracy to long-suffering Afghanistan.

Indeed, in the Parliamentary 'Take Note' debate that was finally held on 10 April 2006 on the Canadian deployment, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a long-term commitment to Canadian troops in Afghanistan on the basis of fighting global terrorism and state-building. The opposition Liberals, of course, backed this reasoning, given that they had made the commitment to the deployment when still the government in the fall of 2005, without bothering to brief Parliament and the country on the extent of the mission. The Bloc Québécois and the NDP affirmed the all-party consensus to 'support the troops,' illustrating just how out of touch parliamentary representation is from the Canadian people. No party even insisted on the basic democratic principle that Parliament should have the constitutional right to approve or reject any foreign troop deployment through motion and debate, rather than Prime Ministerial executive action in the name of the sover-

eign (yes, to Canada's shame, in the name of the British crown!). The debate mainly revealed that Canada was not in fact in charge as of yet of NATO multinational force operating under UN backing, but was in fact under U.S. command in southern Afghanistan. Such is the practice of democratic sovereignty in Canada today.

THE MEDIA & THE WAR

Since the new deployment, Canada's political and economic elites have been working the media to convince Canadians of the importance of the battle of Afghanistan. The unstated goal has been to obscure the nature of the 'long war' that Canada has now formally taken up, and the purpose of Canada's growing military integration with the USA. The initial media coverage of the Canadian Kandahar deployment illustrates this well.

The pages of the *Toronto Star* have been one terrain of this pitched battle. A most strident defender of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan has been the University of Calgary's and the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute's (CDFAI) David Bercuson. Bercuson is often noted as a member of the 'Calgary School' of academics closely associated with Prime Minister Harper and the Conservative Party. Bercuson began his March 7 opinion piece in the *Star* ("Public hasn't grasped reality of war: Afghanistan far from peacekeeping; Canadians") with the declaration that "the core mission of all armies is not to wear blue helmets and 'peace-keep,' but to fight wars and prepare for wars." Bercuson

blustered that "many Canadians clearly didn't get the message at all" of General Rick Hillier, Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff, when he explained the dangers of the mission. Bercuson went on to outline a U.S. Marine commander's vision of how western militaries such as Canada's will be "fighting an all-out insurgency."

Bercuson's CDFAI has been a shameless supporter of the Afghanistan mission and closer military and foreign policy integration with the USA. A CDFAI paper, co-authored by Bercuson, titled "*In the National Interest: Canadian Foreign Policy in an Insecure World*" states that "the only real imperative in Canadian foreign policy is Canada's relationship with the U.S. All other Canadian international interests are far behind the importance of



maintaining friendly and workable relations with the Americans.” Bercuson and his co-authors go on to argue that Canada should make sure that interoperability with the U.S. military is a prerequisite for weapons procurement for Canada’s military.

For his part, the liberal Richard Gwyn, also writing for the *Toronto Star* on February 21 (“*Afghan task good – but painful – for Canada*”), took up the war cry with a strident description of a firefight between Canadian soldiers defending their base and Afghan insurgents. The firefight serves as premise for Gwyn to explain to his readers that “killing the bad guys – the Taliban – is an integral part of the mission,” as well as dealing with the “almost as dangerous” drug lords (Gwyn wilfully ignoring that many of these sit in the elected parliament, and as part of the process of ‘state-building’ the NATO countries are working to convince the drug lords to invest their earnings in Afghanistan!). Gwyn then rhetorically asks: “Is it worth while? It is most certainly to the 3 million Afghan refugees who, after decades of civil war and slaughter, have at last come back from Pakistan” and “the immense numbers of Afghans” that voted in “peaceable elections.” Further, Canada at war is justified by the “hundreds of thousands of girls” able to go to school, and the farmers who “by using mobile phones” could pick the best time to send their sheep and goats to market.

Like the slavish American media, the Canadian press has just as ardently linked the Canadian effort to the ‘war on terror’ (parroting the falsifications of Prime Minister Harper and General Hillier). In a March 12 in the *Toronto Star* column (“*For 50 years we’ve been told we are peacekeepers, as though that never involves killing*”) plumping for war, Rondi Anderson, a neoliberal currently being feted for getting the *Toronto Star* to open its pages regularly to her shrill writing, reminded readers that “Canadians were murdered on 9/11.” All that was left was the editorial group itself to jump on board the ‘let’s go-to-war’ bandwagon. Indeed, on March 3 the editorial pages screamed with concern that Canada not “be the ‘weak link’ in the coalition” as “our American neighbour has been attacked and we have been named on Al Qaeda’s hit list. Our reply must be a steely one.” These sentiments for war have



been echoed in the rest of Canada’s media, often in even more strident terms than Canada’s ‘social justice’ paper of record. Such is the appalling state of journalism in this country.

BUSINESS & STATE SUPPORT FOR WAR

The above media war posturing actively mis-represents the nature of Canadian military policy, the Afghanistan context and the reasons for war. It is no secret that the Canadian media is one of the most concentrated and controlled by the capitalist class. And the CBC state media can hardly be congratulated for widening the political range of opinion in general, and in particular the shameful way ‘The National’ covered the initial deployment to Kandahar. It is no secret that the major capitalist organizations in Canada have been campaigning for deeper military and security integration with the U.S. as one means to secure market access. This process had already begun under the Liberals. Both the Chrétien and Martin administrations had begun linking Canada more closely to the U.S. in security and military matters even while avoiding a combat role directly in Iraq. This was partly through support deployments in the Gulf and by providing a security force for the Afghanistan front in the initial War on Terror.

The Canadian Council of Chief Executive’s (CCCE) “New Frontiers: Building a 21st Century Canada-United

States Partnership” position paper, published in April 2004, argued for the establishment of a U.S. led continental defence perimeter. It also stated that Canada should “no longer be a free rider and a toothless advocate of soft power,” and should instead be “serious about being a true ally in the struggle for global peace and security.”

The Canadian Government’s 2005 International Policy Statement focussed on “security” and re-shaping the strategic capabilities and orientation of the Canadian Forces. The Statement, closely matching Bercuson’s vision, sees Canada’s troops being more functionally capable of being deployed to fight counter-insurgencies. This is only one component of the entire re-thinking of Canadian security, defence and foreign policies to bring them in line with the Bush Doctrine of ‘pre-emptive war’ and the U.S. and NATO campaigns in the Middle East. With the new Canadian deployment in Afghanistan, the media ideologues, the corporate elites, and Canada’s new foreign policy agenda are becoming as one.

AN AFGHAN SECURITY THREAT TO CANADA?

The making of the security threat in Afghanistan that has brought Canada now to an explicit war front needs to be examined. It is an area of the greatest silences in the barrage of Canadian media propaganda in ‘support of the troops.’ →

Beginning in 1979, and continuing throughout the 1980s, it was the United States, in concert with Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and others, that trained and equipped the Muslim fascists that made up the Mujahideen who fought against the secular government of Afghanistan and its Soviet backers. Historian V.G. Kiernan, in his book, *America, The New Imperialism: From White Settlement to World He-*

lies” occupying Afghanistan. This means, of course, compromising with warlords, drug runners, arms traders, and all else of course that constitutes the Afghan private sector after more than two decades of strife. Just as they supported the worst kind of people in the anti-communist project almost two decades ago, today the U.S. and Canadian troops prop up an Afghan government loaded with warlords and rife with corruption (including the incredibly seedy Washington stooge and former Taliban supporter, Prime Minister Hamid Karzai).

The neoliberal agenda in the creation of the new Afghan state was all too evident in the Afghan Government’s statement of principles in its National Development Budget plans, meant to guide fiscal and development decision making. This document declares, in a country piecing itself back together at desperate levels of income, that “the State has a very limited role in the production of goods and services. The private sector is the primary producer of goods and services.” It further goes on to proclaim, in the face of the enormous evidence to the contrary, especially for developing countries, that “international experience shows that the private sector implements more cheaply than the public sector. To ensure that the greatest number of services can be delivered with the limited resources, the private sector should be the implementer of projects unless there are strong reasons for alternative arrangements.”

Media analysis of the Afghan war, and political commentary from all sides of the House as well, have also ignored the intertwining of the military project in Afghanistan and arms sales. It is one of the areas of public spending that consistently escapes neoliberal scrutiny. Defence industry corporations in Canada and the U.S. make billions on ‘missions’ such as ‘the war on terror.’ They are part of the continual military policy cycle of external threat, destabilization and intervention, arms spending, new weapons development and procurement, followed by a new external threat. This process has been a theme of writing on the political economy of North American military spending for some time. It is now nicely depicted in the documentary playing at cinemas across



DND

gemony, explained that after the Soviet intervention in 1979, “the CIA soon assembled... forces from some of the most reactionary elements of contemporary Islam, not only in Afghanistan but also from distant reaches of the Arabian peninsula.” One of these “holy warriors” was the now infamous Osama Bin Laden who would later state: “I set up my first camp where the volunteers were trained by Pakistani and American officers. The weapons were supplied by the Americans, the money by the Saudis.”

The sin of the People’s Democratic Party which controlled the Afghan Government in the late nineteen seventies and throughout the nineteen eighties was its espousal of anti-imperialism, nationalism,

and Marxism as well as its closeness to the Soviet Union. The government, among other progressive moves, engaged in land redistribution, the construction of schools, establishment of women’s rights (including the right to an education) and the cancellation of peasant debt to money lenders. The U.S., as has been its historical habit in other theatres, supported the landowners and other elites, many of whom were Islamic clerics. What followed was twelve years of vicious warfare and terrorism that transformed Afghanistan into a nightmare state where American cold warriors and religious fascists conspired to destroy every meaningful gain made by the Afghan people. The U.S., and its partners, spent more than \$1.5 billion destroying Afghanistan through supporting terrorists. The Taliban and Al Qaeda that the Canadian military has been combating in Afghanistan since late 2001 are the heirs turned disgruntled terrorists of Washington’s less than noble intervention in that country. This awful truth has been wilfully ignored by Bercuson, Gwyn, the CCCE, and the Canadian Government, regardless of the party. Their new-found concern for Afghan school girls and 3

NEOLIBERALISM: STATE-BUILDING & MILITARY SPENDING

million refugees in Pakistan would have been misplaced had Uncle Sam and the other Western imperialist powers had left well enough alone and not trained and armed their old religious allies turned mortal enemy.

As in Iraq, the priority to establishment of a neoliberal policy regime in Afghanistan under the auspices of rebuilding a ‘failed state’ and in the name of security has also missed serious examination by the media or Canadian politicians. A market economy under western control has been the aim of the U.S. and its ‘al-

lies” occupying Afghanistan. This means, of course, compromising with warlords, drug runners, arms traders, and all else of course that constitutes the Afghan private sector after more than two decades of strife. Just as they supported the worst kind of people in the anti-communist project almost two decades ago, today the U.S. and Canadian troops prop up an Afghan government loaded with warlords and rife with corruption (including the incredibly seedy Washington stooge and former Taliban supporter, Prime Minister Hamid Karzai).

North America, 'Why We Fight' (2005).

Since 9/11, and well before the recent moves to extend aggressive Canadian military interventions abroad, Canada's security and defence spending has been growing rapidly and yearly. Canada's 2005 Federal Budget of the Martin Government approved \$12.8 billion over five years for the military in 2005. Conservatives have at least \$5 billion more during the election. This is likely to grow, given the commitments to expand troop levels and the need to more rapidly replace equipment being deployed. On top of this, Harper remains committed to additional spending on Arctic patrols and seemingly to additional Canadian actions in other areas of the world (beyond the military intervention still ongoing in Haiti). For example, a beneficiary of the explosion of the defence budget and Afghan mission has been General Dynamics Land Systems (GDLS). In 2004, the London, Ontario based GDLS Canada was awarded a \$165 million contract extension to manage Canadian Forces light armoured vehicles such as the air-transportable LAV III, a weapons system in which Canadian soldiers patrol Afghanistan. GDLS Canada has also recently won a contract worth \$60.2 million for twenty-five Mine Protected Vehicles. Canadian Forces previously deployed three of these vehicles in Afghanistan and they have been considered suitable for the security operation there and

in other theatres. As well, \$750 million has been slated for a Multi-Mission Effects Vehicle (MMEV) that will be able to combat both air and land targets under the Canadian Forces's new security doctrine.

The howitzers being used by Canadian troops (and beloved by the Canadian media in their discussion of firefights) are manufactured by BAE Systems, and were procured from the U.S. Marines Corps as part of a \$234 million Foreign Military Sales Contract. The appointment by Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper of a defence industry lobbyist to the post of Minister of National Defence, Gordon O'Connor, signals the all too cozy relationship between profit-making in weapons and military strategy.

'GETTING IT'

The crowing by the Canadian media and neoliberals about Operation Archer to rescue a 'failed state' and to contribute to 'nation building' in Afghanistan conceals more than it reveals about the actual political forces at work. It is as dishonest as the propaganda and falsehoods that launched the American operations in Iraq. The cost is Afghani and Canadian lives. The 'national interest' is in fact being seamlessly connected to 'corporate interests' in the making of neoliberal globalization. The imperialist deployment of the

Canadian military – still effectively operating under U.S. command in Afghanistan – is one form of this connection. Another form is the rights-violating anti-terrorism laws, with their use of security certificates and illegal internment of Canadian citizens abroad. It is a terrible shame that none of this came out in the Parliamentary debate on the Afghan troop deployment: the all-party consensus to back the troops, including from Jack Layton's NDP ever more cozying up to the Conservatives, held steadfast. The NDP is expressing concern only over the 'terms of engagement' and the 'prospects for success' of the mission. The extent of the NDP's 'bold' opposition is to call for another 'debate and a vote in the future' if the Canadian mission is extended. This is something that the Canadian peace and union movements must say is simply not good enough.

The Harper government and the Canadian media have been complaining that Canadians have not been 'getting it' in their lukewarm 'support for the troops' abroad. This is another falsehood perpetuated by ruling elites. As Canadians increasingly 'get it', they ever more oppose the war and make the connection with all that is rotten with neoliberalism, capitalism and democracy today. **R**

Richard Harding is an activist in Windsor CAW Local 200.

errata

Below is a correction to the SALDA Roundtable on Faith-Based Arbitration in Ontario, which appeared in the previous issue of Relay. The correction concerns the last contribution to the roundtable.

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Nadira: Absolutely. I attended a lecture on the Muslim diaspora given by a woman from France. She said that she was very afraid because in France they see there are Muslim youth who feel they cannot be themselves anywhere but in the mosque, which helps them develop an integrated identity that is extremely important for their psychological well being. If you are going to alienate them so much, any human being will look for that wholeness somewhere. So this progressive scholar was very worried about what is happening: this puts these youth under the supervision of the mosque leadership alone, they are listening to them alone. The students here who go to the mosque and often adopt Islamic garb, such as the hijab, are likely to have a more enhanced self-identity; however, from what they tell me, at another level they still feel very marginal in mainstream society and are afraid they won't get jobs because they wear hijab. Who is talking to these young people? There's nobody going and talking to them, even from among the Muslim progressives. I wonder if they would even have much credibility with these youth, because they're just not used to speaking with them in a way that respects the youth. When I want to do programs with girls after school, they tell me they have to be home right after school. They tell me that their parents weren't so strict back in Pakistan. Their parents are not integrating because there's nothing to receive them, nothing to integrate into. They're here in a vacuum. When the Muslim parents tell that they don't want their kids turning out like 'Canadian' kids, I say, "You know what? Canadian parents say exactly the same thing, 'We don't want our children doing such and such thing'." So you have this in common, but they're not talking to each other. I'm also talking about integrated Pakistanis who have been here for a long time. They have no connection these new immigrants.

Resistance on the Mexican 'Riviera': The Zapatistas visit Manzanillo, Colima

Jess MacKenzie and Ernest Tate

The view south-east across the bay from the hills of Las Hadas, the hotel zone in Manzanillo, is especially beautiful in the evening as the sun sets and the white painted hotels and restaurants stretching for several miles sparkle in the sun behind the curving beach. It's a major Pacific port for Mexico and has grown quickly in recent years under globalization and tourism. Large container ships, bulk carriers from all over the world and massive cruise ships come and go from the port. But on a clear day, above the low hills towards the far end of the bay, just above the "centro-historico," a large white plume can be seen rising into the sky, forming small cumulous-like clouds, which drift most days slowly over the city. A tourist can be forgiven for thinking this is from a volcano, of which there are many in Mexico. But it isn't. It's the combustion gases from the stacks of two large thermal-electric generating plants, almost hidden behind the hills, and depending upon wind direction, they give an unpleasant yellow hue to the air above this community, which promotes itself as "the Mexican Riviera."

We were to learn that the electricity plants, constructed and operated by Federal Electricity Commission (CFE), the state-controlled electricity system, are located next to the fishing and farming village of Campos, the residents of which, along with surrounding communities, have been fighting CFE for years because of the environmental catastrophe caused by the discharges from its plants. Now these communities are confronting an even deeper crisis. For centuries, local fishermen have depended upon the local lagoons – such as the 7,200 hectare Laguna de Cuyutlan, described as an "eco-paradise" in tourist brochures – as a source of livelihood, but these waters, which already have suffered serious pollution because of toxic fall-out from the plants, are threatened with even greater devastation when a project gets underway by a large Spanish multi-national, Zeta Gas company, to build in the area a large facility for the transformation of liquid natural gas back into normal gas and the production of butane. According to Bio Iguana, an environmental non-governmental organization, twenty gigantic storage tanks have already been constructed to store gas. The area – which includes two other lagoons – is to be turned into an industrial corridor, a U.S. two billion dollar investment, with the excavation of a deep canal to allow the entry of large ocean going tankers. Local activists say coastal wetlands and the lagoons' fragile eco-systems will be destroyed, and that thousands of farming and fishing families will be displaced.

We were quite surprised one morning to learn from the local paper, *El Noticiero*, that in Campos, on Thursday, March 30th, there would be a community rally for Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional's (EZLN) leader, Sub-comandante Marcos,

a half-way point on his tour of the country, consisting of some forty meetings, concluding on June 25th in Mexico City. A 20-vehicle caravan would be in Campos, *El Noticiero* said, to express solidarity with David Diaz Valdez, a leader in the community and the local fishing cooperative, recently released from jail after having chained himself to the fence of the CFE plant during a protest. We thought it would be an excellent opportunity to learn more about the EZLN's "La Otra Campana," its new political and organizational offensive directed to all thirty-one states of Mexico which it had launched on January 2nd, significantly the exact day of the Zapatista-led violent uprising in Chiapas 12 years ago when it first came to the attention of the world with its clarion call for resistance to globalization. At the time, with their proposals for new methods of self-government and autonomy for 32 indigenous communities, Marcos and the EZLN had captured the imagination of the anti-globalization movement and much of the left. We decided to make our way there.

We also wanted to hear what Marcos would say about the current Mexican presidential campaign, in this "season of protest", and to see on the ground, so to speak, how it related to the EZLN's strategy for building "an alliance with the non-electoral left in Mexico who want to build from below". The EZLN's "Sixth Declaration", (known in Mexico as the "Sexta") – which forms the basis of "La Otra Campana," adopted last year by a broad coalition of left and activists groups and open to "non-registered

Features of Mexican "La Otra Campana"

(From the letter of invitation, sent by Sub-comandante Marcos to the "La Otra Campana" plenary gathering, September, 2005.)

For a National Plan of Struggle and a new Mexican constitution; for civilian and peaceful methods; national and anti-capitalist; recognizing the limits of single issue activities and seeing the need to combine with other struggles; an understanding and assistance to all struggles on behalf of humanity and against world-wide neoliberalism; left-wing, another kind of politics; favouring listening and getting to know the struggles and the fight-backs that are presently taking place around the country; being in solidarity with these struggles, helping them and learning from them; respecting organizations, groups, collectives and individuals work methods, decision-making, demands, strategies and tactics; always basing ourselves on mutual respect, linking struggles and organizations. •

political parties” - denounced all three major capitalist parties for being in the service of neoliberalism, and attacked the Partido Revolucionario Democracia (PRD) very sharply for its betrayal of the San Andreas Accords (negotiated with the President Vicente Fox to give some autonomy to indigenous communities, but which went nowhere). The Zapatistas have also declared their solidarity with Cuba and Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution.

In his debate with some on the left who have urged him to support the PRD’s candidate, Andre Manuel Lopez Obrador, Marcos has said that Lopez Obrador speaks with two tongues – one for the popular movements, seeming to agree with many of their demands, and one for the ruling elites to whom he promises to continue as usual with Fox’s neoliberal agenda. “The PRD has been hijacked by scoundrels,” the Zapatista leader says, and points to the repressive actions of some PRD controlled municipal governments in Chiapas, their violence against Zapatista activists and that they cut off water to some Zapatista influenced indigenous communities.

The EZLN’s move out of the jungles of Lacandona seems to be geared to taking maximum advantage of this unique moment in the Mexican political cycle, of a heightened interest in politics. A new president comes into office every six years in Mexico, the “sixeno” as it is known, a time when all the protest movements seem to come onto the streets to air grievances and try and get their demands addressed. While Marcos was touring the country, highways were being blocked close to the Guatemala border in Chiapas by thousands of peasants who were complaining about the lack of action by state and federal authorities to deal with damage caused by recent storms. Many thousands of trade unionists were also out on the streets of Mexico City, as were environmental and anti-privatization activists outside the World Water Forum. We were reminded of the last “sixeno” in 2000, when Fox came into office. At that time, we were in the city of Oaxaca in the southern part of the country. All on a single day, in a relatively small city with a population of around 250,000, we witnessed three serious protest mobilizations. First, early in the morning, we came upon several thousand indigenous people who told us they had travelled to the city by an all night trek in open trucks from the mountains. In many of their hands were red flags, bearing the unmistakable symbol of the hammer and sickle, as they massed in front of the state legislature and blocked the main roads to protest against the lack of action by the state in prosecuting a police officer who had killed three peasants the previous year. Then, later in the morning, we met a protest march of over a thousand university students, complaining about arbitrary changes to their curriculum, which would have made it difficult to hold part-time jobs. And that afternoon we encountered another protest march winding its way through the narrow streets, calling for a raise in teachers’ salaries.

In this “season of protest” we made our way to Campos, to participate in the EZLN rally. The taxi driver was curious as to why we wanted to go there. He suggested taking us to the beach instead, but we told him we weren’t interested. He was good humoured enough, but he obviously thought we were a little crazy. He was trying to be helpful. “Tourists never visit that place,” he said, “there’s nothing there.” Campos is a small rural community

typical of many in Mexico, not particularly remarkable in itself, but what is immediately striking about it are the two large smokestacks billowing combustion gases close by above the roof-tops and trees. The acrid smell of the sulphurous fumes is impossible to escape. We could feel it in our lungs with every breath. We could taste it.

As we strolled up the street to the main square, we could hear music playing from a sound system and we could see a cluster of people standing around, some sitting under a large awning for protection against the hot sun. Not a large crowd, but it was still early. Posters and banners from many groups such as the Communist Party (which re-constituted itself a few years ago), the Marxist-Leninists, the EZLN, and other community and environmental activist groups, fluttered in the breeze. If the banners were an indication at all, it would seem the far left was well represented. The EZLN had its literature table up at the rear of the gathering with its publications and compact discs of its radio broadcasts



from the jungle, for sale. People were moving around selling papers.

We bought the EZLN’s, the Communist Party’s and the Marxist-Leninist’s publication, which incredibly, sports a picture of Stalin, and it’s not there to just illustrate an article! At that stage, our overall impression was that this was a kind of far-left event, even though there seemed to be a lot of families, with a proportionately higher number of women, but across all generations. Children were running around playing. Two or three hundred people sat patiently waiting for the event to begin, most of them youth. There was a festive air. People were sitting chatting; thirty or so from the media were waiting with their cameras. Marcos is big news in Mexico. A few police kept their distance. It was not obvious to us that there were any other Canadians or Americans present.

The EZLN leader was coming from the state capital, Colima, where he had addressed a community gathering that day. *El Noticiero*, the local newspaper, reported that the EZLN’s caravan would be in Campos by 4.40pm, and he arrived on time. The audience had grown to between 500 and 600 people, clearly an important community event. Suddenly there was a flutter of excitement. Marcos and his comrades strode to the front. Many in the audience rushed over to greet him, crowding around his slight figure.

Before Marcos spoke, more than twenty – yes twenty – representatives, some of them from activist groups in the →

community campaigning against CFE and the proposed industrial development, some from other states asking the coalition for help, addressed the gathering. And for some it was the first time they had spoken to a meeting. An objective of "La Otra Campana", is to give the most oppressed an opportunity to express their thoughts and to listen to each other respectfully and for the EZLN to hear what they are saying. It was a very moving experience, to witness this.

"For thirty years it has been a community struggle against the poisonous fumes," a fisherman from Cuyutlan said. "Today marks the end of the process of negotiating with state institutions without receiving a response," he warned. "We've decided to go into resistance." Many of the speakers were women, who spoke simply and eloquently. A health activist spoke of the increase in cancers in the area, and the general rise of respiratory illnesses among children. Several farmers told of no longer being able to grow food on what was once fertile land. The nearby lagoons, historically a rich source of fish, were in peril, a speaker from a fishers' cooperative reported. A leader from Bio Iguana, an environmental organization, backed this up.

Many stressed that they were not in opposition to development as such, but were against development that did not take into account its impact upon the lives of the ordinary people. A woman from the community of Santiago, just north of Manzanillo, reported on the impact of the building of a new highway, which was destroying many beaches and cutting the community off from the ocean. Some large hotels are being allowed to privatize traditional public beaches, she said. A speaker from Baja California spoke of the community struggle in that state against a major natural gas pipeline and gas storage facility, which was part of large project to facilitate the integration of Mexico's energy resources into the economy of the United States. He described the destruction of the fragile coastal eco-systems and the decline of the whale population, which has always used that area as a migration route. At least two speakers, who seemed to us to be representatives from indigenous communities, were listened to very carefully and respectfully when they spoke of their own histories of resistance. The only formal political party to have a speaker on the platform was the Communist Party, which is part of the coalition.

The most dramatic speech, however, was given by David Diaz Valdez. His wife, Eduvige also spoke. She and other family members had also been arrested and suffered physical violence from the cops. The audience went deathly silent when Diaz Valdez stood up, even the children who until then had been running around playing. Only the gentle rustle of leaves in the breeze could be heard. There was no mistaking his affiliation: he wore the red EZLN tee shirt. "We are the marginalized," he declared in his strong voice, "we're the last frontier fighting a bad system of government and against the destruction of our environment," a phrase he repeated several times. He told the audience of his arrest by the police for only exercising his democratic right to protest, how they had planted drugs in his car and how he had been tortured in Colima, the state capital, and held incommunicado in chains. He repeated a theme which ran through many of the presentations, that the municipal -controlled by the National Action Party (PAN) - state and federal authorities ignore the

constitution and were violating the rights of citizens every day. "We need a new political system and a new Mexican constitution." Many speakers attacked the state government for the sale of the nearby Juluapan lagoon to private interests and criticized the President, Vicente Fox, for the failure to carry out the promises he had made six years ago.

Many expressed their thanks and appreciation to Marcos for his help in their campaigns, a few of them handing over to him personally, petitions and letters and assorted documents, as if he was someone who could solve their problems. "We're not surprised Marcos is the government's enemy, just like the people were when they fought in the Revolution of 1910, just like us," one said. A consistent theme from most the speeches was that the three levels of government constantly violated government rules and regulations and ignored the constitution in favour of the wealthy and that a new constitution was necessary for Mexico. This is one of the central demands of "La Otra Campana".

For two hours, Marcos sat there respectfully and patiently, listening intently, wearing a cell-phone headset, smoking his pipe all the time, sometimes glancing at the speakers and making notes (some of his meetings have gone on for more than eight hours.) On each side of him were his EZLN comrades and supporters, but he was the only one wearing the signature black, balaclava mask. The sight at first seemed somewhat surreal and even a little theatrical. Because of his struggles, he has become something of a folk-hero throughout Mexico. Even the government owned tourist shops in Mexico City sells "Marcos" dolls. We thought he must have been very warm - it was around 30 degrees centigrade - but on closer examination we could see the balaclava was made from very light cotton. We also wondered how we could be sure this was the real Marcos. But the audience's reaction to him let us know that this was the real thing, especially when he stood up to speak. There was loud welcoming applause.

He opened his remarks by calling for peaceful and non-violent resistance, emphasizing the "need to struggle against these outrages committed by the state authorities in Colima." He spoke to the major issues raised by the previous speakers. They are

The Mexican Election Campaign

The country is getting ready to vote July 2nd. Much of the Mexican press is saying Andre Manuel Lopez Obrador, the Partido Revolucionario Democracia (PRD)'s candidate and the ex-mayor of Mexico City, has a good chance of winning and that Mexico will become part of the trend sweeping many parts of Latin America and move to the left. As this point, it's unclear how far to the left, but it certainly seems large parts of the ruling class thinks it will be too far. Lopez Obrador, who has been ahead in the polls for the last three years, and who on March 30th had a lead of as much as 9% in some polls, has seen his lead begin to narrow. The current President, the neoliberal Vicente Fox, and his right-wing National Action Party (PAN) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which had ruled Mexico for 71 years before Fox, are engaged in a massive effort to discredit Lopez Obrador through vicious red-baiting.

taking the land from the poor, he said, and giving it to the rich, to the large hotel owners and to industry. "And this is happening in Campos, a community which is impoverished and becoming sicker and where the arrival of progress makes only a few wealthy." When the government speaks of progress, he said, it is not "talking about progress for the people, but for the likes of Carlos Slim, who is behind much of the buying of land and who owns businesses which are destroying communities such as Campos." [Carlos Slim Helu, a Mexican mogul, is the world's third richest man, with \$28.8 U.S. billion, according to Forbes.] Speaking of the proposed "regasification" facility at the new port on Cuyutlan lagoon, Marcos said he was making what he hoped wouldn't be "a terrible prophecy", that the large gas tanker ships would bring many more problems to the community such as drugs and prostitution.

He criticized the building of luxury hotels for the tourist industry right here in Manzanillo, some charging over \$1000

a night in the midst of a housing crises and when many people cannot afford even a modest place to live. He called for the defeat of the government (we assume he meant the Federal) — without specifying what would take its place — and for the elaboration of a new constitution. "The government is at the service of a system which we want to destroy; when they speak of progress and development, we have to ask for whom?" You should ask yourselves whether you are better off than before, he said. If the answer is no, you should all rise up, all at the same time and defeat the government, "because this movement is not only a movement confined to Chiapas or Colima, but a movement of the whole country." With "another government", Campos could return again to being a producer of fruit and vegetables, and not the sickness of cancer.

What was remarkable to us was that there was no reference to any of the major three candidates in the current presidential campaign, neither in the remarks of any of the earlier speakers nor by Marcos! "Every three years, every six years they come to sell us the same lie," he stated, "they have nothing to give us, and there is nothing of use to us that we won't build ourselves with our own strength. Things will only change from below and from the left." If politics at the level of the Mexican state was referred to at all, it seemed to be in a completely abstract way, such as, "we need a new political system", unless, of course, our Spanish is not up to the task of detecting such subtleties. The "La Otra Campana" seems to be completely extra-parliamentary in its focus. The only practical measure proposed at the Campos rally was that the community should continue with their resistance, and even intensify it. We asked ourselves whether we were seeing an application of John Holloway's ideas from his "Changing the World Without Taking Power"? But this would be too easy an explanation.

The EZLN must realize that their demand, for example, for

a new Mexican constitution, poses the question of power and raises the question of how this demand will be achieved. It's obvious that a political organization of some kind will have to be created to win control of government to attain this. And activism alone on ecological issues will not put a stop to Mexico's environmental degradation. Some on the left inside and outside Mexico, from day one, have criticized the EZLN for not building a revolutionary party to struggle for socialism. But this criticism may be, to say the least, far too premature. While the Sixth Declaration makes a withering criticism of the big capitalist parties, it's not against political parties as such and leaves that door open. The EZLN seems to be going through a process of change from being essentially an armed-struggle

movement, an "army," to becoming a political organization of some kind and Holloway may be over-generalizing from what is but a moment in the history of its evolution.

However, if it's a political party that comes out of all this, it will probably be quite different



from anything we've seen before, and obviously shaped by the experience in Chiapas. But there's no doubt the EZLN's present "non-political" line will give them some difficulties in the current conjuncture because many activists will be swept up into electoral politics behind Lopez Obrador. The old notion that politics abhors a vacuum applies here. Already a key veteran of the C.P., Armando Martinez Verdugo, has broken ranks. But the evidence suggests the EZLN is not thinking in the short-term but maybe of the next "Sixeno." We prefer to see it as being in the process of consolidating its forces and supporters outside its base in Chiapas. They are a mass phenomenon. Their powerful hard-won position as the voice of Mexico's most oppressed, the 10,000,000 indigenous and the poor, combined with their strong opposition to environmental degradation as seen in Campos, has placed them in a key strategic position to lead in a genuine recomposition of the Mexican left. Marcos seems to hope they will eventually win over those social activists who are now supporting Lopez Obrador but who will eventually be disappointed by him, to help in the building of an effective mass political force capable of fundamentally changing Mexico.

As we were leaving Manzanillo to head back to Toronto, we noticed the headlines in *El Noticiero*: the local authorities had put a halt to the Zeta Gas construction project until a review takes place of its safety and whether or not it conformed to regulations. We don't know for how long. Apparently, a large barge had gone aground which raised security concerns. We couldn't help but make the connection between this stoppage and Marcos' visit to the Mexican "Riviera." And we're sure the political activists we had heard in Campos, thought likewise. **R**

Jess MacKenzie and Ernest Tate are long-time activists since the fifties and sixties — in the British & Canadian socialist left.

Hotel Workers Rising

Nicole Cohen

A few days before International Women's Day in early March, Zeleda Davis, a room attendant at Toronto's Doubletree International Plaza Hotel, stood up at a meeting of her co-workers and women from various feminist groups and explained the details of her job. Her typical eight-hour shift includes loading a large, burdensome cart and pushing it to the other side of the hotel (which takes about 30 minutes), then thoroughly cleaning and making up beds in 16 rooms.

Lately, her job has become increasingly difficult. Beds have changed over the years as hotel ownership has consolidated under a few multinationals, which now compete to out-luxuriate each other at workers' expense. Chains such as Starwood, Hilton and Marriott have introduced what they call "heavenly beds," with bigger, heavier mattresses and fluffier pillows, making rooms more difficult and time-consuming to clean.

Davis now makes up heavier mattresses with duvets and extra sheets and places five pillows where there used to be two. She still has only eight hours in which to do the work, and her rate of pay has not increased. She suffers from back and shoulder pain and, like many room attendants, carries painkillers with her at all times. Many of her co-workers are on modified duties due to bed-related injuries and have had a difficult time being compensated. "We are walking injuries," Davis says. "Everyday our jobs get harder."

The feminist meeting was part of Hotel Workers Rising, a North America-wide campaign organized by hotel workers and their union, UNITE HERE, to raise standards of work and living for those employed in some of the most strenuous, underpaid jobs in the service sector. Hotel workers, especially room attendants, are overwhelmingly immigrants and women of colour. The median wage for Toronto hotel workers is \$26,000 per year, and many work two or three jobs. According to UNITE HERE, room attendants' injuries are escalating: 91 percent of 600 room attendants surveyed in Canada and the United States say they suffer from work-related pain, and room attendants report more injuries than heavy construction workers.

As 23 hotels across Toronto geared up to negotiate new employee contracts in the spring, hotel workers and UNITE HERE Local 75 began mobilizing community support, support they need to demand better pay and lighter workloads, benefits, training and promotions and subsidized transit. The Fairmont Royal York, which reached an agreement in November, has now set the standards for equal opportunity training and subsidized transit passes, both critical to improving standards of living and work. The campaign's broad goals include raising wages throughout the industry, easing housekeepers' workloads and winning employer neutrality during organizing drives. (Only three-quarters of Toronto hotels are unionized. Key non-unionized sites include

about half of the airport-area hotels and several hotels in the Marriott chain, which has the fewest unionized workers).

"The power of companies has grown so power of workers needs to grow," says Andrea Calver, a UNITE HERE Ontario Council organizing coordinator. Hotel multinationals are earning record profits. According to a UNITE HERE fact sheet, "the overall lodging industry earned an estimated \$20.8 billion in profit before taxes in 2005, and those earnings are expected to increase by 21 percent in 2006." Hotels have grown into global corporations that frequently change ownership and are resistant to organizing. As Steven Tufts notes in *Paths to Union Renewal*, hotel multinationals have developed sophisticated resistance to organizing: they employ union-busting consultants and offer some workers wages above those of unionized workers to tame the "union threat." For these reasons, Hotel Workers Rising is concerned with organizing non-unionized workers to consolidate worker power.

The campaign launched in December 2005. At a press conference, actor and activist Danny Glover spoke about the importance of supporting low-waged workers' campaigns, while hotel workers discussed the racialization of hotel work: while white employees work the front-of-the-house and management jobs, black workers and immigrants are concentrated at the back-of-the-house. Often, back-of-the-house workers can't even walk through the hotel's front door. "I want to be at the front of the house too," Felix Odong, a dishwasher at the Royal York for the past seven years, told the *Toronto Star*. "I've been going to university for four years and I haven't been promoted."

In February, Filipino hotel workers held a forum for their community, co-hosted by Filipino migrant worker organization SIKLAB. Women spoke about their working conditions and rallied community solidarity. The meeting was a chance for organizers to make critical links between the political economy of Filipino migration and the current situation of female Filipino workers who clean hotel rooms. Organizers detailed the poverty caused by neoliberal globalization and government policies that have caused mass migration of Filipino women to Canada in search of better work. These women, many of whom are university educated, often end up as domestic workers, live-in caregivers in a problematic government-sponsored program, or in low-paid service jobs. They send billions of dollars in remittances back to the Philippines, which is used to pay down foreign debt. Their government has called them the "modern heroes" of the Philippines and, more recently, "internationally shared human resources."

Acutely aware of the global context in which she works, Victoria Sobrepená, a room attendant at the Delta Chelsea, made it clear that hotel workers are serious about this campaign being

a global one. They have requested language in their new contracts that guarantees non-unionized workers at hotels in foreign countries the right to organize. Says Sobrepená, “If we keep quiet they are going to eat us alive.”

Lilian Salvador, who also spoke at the forum, has been a room attendant for nine years. Thanks to a shoulder injury sustained on the job she was on modified duties at the Holiday Inn on Bloor Street until they told her they had no work for her. While she survives on worker’s compensation, she is involved in the campaign, sitting on the health and safety committee of UNITE HERE and on the executive board of her local.

“It’s time for us to make a change,” she said in her brief speech. Salvador has helped bring about change before. She used to have to clean 18 rooms per eight-hour shift, for \$9.25 per hour. After a five-month “work and walk” job action, her workload was reduced to 16 rooms per shift and her hourly wages rose to \$14.25. Victories such as this one, along with worker solidarity, have fuelled this campaign. In September, over-worked attendants at the Fairmont Royal York took their 15-minute breaks simultaneously to protest escalating workloads.

Last fall and winter, UNITE HERE held six room attendant workshops across North America on consciousness raising, developing leadership skills and brainstorming ways to solve problems in housekeeping departments. Facilitators from Toronto, Chicago, Boston and Los Angeles were trained together and workshops were held simultaneously, reflecting the need for unified resistance to global companies that have uniform corporate standards. “It literally is impossible in some cases to change things one hotel at a time,” says Calver. “To change standards it has to be a global campaign.”

In a show of global solidarity, hotel workers from Hawaii, Boston, Los Angeles, Chicago and New Jersey joined their Toronto counterparts in the rally and march for International Women’s Day. A delegation of room attendants and laundry

workers performed as the UNITE HERE choir, then hotel workers led the 3,500-strong demo through the downtown core. About 100 workers from the Delta Chelsea hotel who were on break emerged as the march passed and were greeted with the chant, “Women’s work has value too, Delta Chelsea shame on you!” They were overwhelmed by the support.

“What transforms people in their understanding of the humanity of the issue is meeting each other and struggling together,” says Calver. Making community connections is critical to this campaign. Several hundred women signed letters at the rally outlining their concern for room attendants’ working conditions. At the end of March, letters were delivered to hotels by feminist

delegations. “This action empowers workers and the community, it’s crucial if we’re going to build a movement that’s going to address issues of the low-wage community.”

According to the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, one million workers in the Greater Toronto Area earn under \$29,800 per year. From a pool of just over two million workers, this means half of workers in the GTA are not making enough working one job to support their families. The Hotel Workers Rising campaign intends to address this poverty head-on.

It’s a broad-based effort to raise awareness and support for hotel workers’ struggles and to mobilize hotel workers to demand better standards of living and work from employers. The campaign is mobilizing on a global level and organizing across borders, raising awareness about the value of women’s work and the work of immigrants and low-paid workers in the service sector. Led by women like Zeleda Davis, Lilian Salvador and Victoria Sobrepená, thousands of hotel workers across North America are rising up to resist, refusing to suffer for a few extra pillows. **R**

Nicole Cohen is a freelance journalist and a graduate student at York University.

Visit www.hotelworkersrising.org for more information.



The Problem of Democracy in the U.S. Labour Movement

An Interview with Herman Benson,
founder of the *Association for Union Democracy*

Interview by Ian Macdonald

From a small office in Brooklyn, NY, Herman Benson receives calls and gives advice to rank-and-file trade unionists across the United States who are fighting against corruption and undemocratic practices in their locals. He is the editor of the bi-monthly Review of Union Democracy, which documents these struggles, and has recently written the semi-autobiographical book, Rebels, Reformers, & Racketeers: How Insurgents Transformed the Labor Movement (2005). He also keeps a blog (bensonsudblog.blogspot.com) which collects his thoughts on recent developments in the movement. Having radicalized at the outbreak of the Great Depression, when he joined the American Socialist Party in time to campaign for Norman Thomas in the 1932 Presidential election, and having spent the following seven decades as an activist and close, critical observer of the US labour movement, Benson brings a uniquely historical perspective to current debates that is, at the same time, refreshingly direct.

Ian Macdonald: This past year's split in the AFL-CIO comes after a decade of efforts by the Sweeney leadership to revitalize the organized labour movement in this country. The results have been disappointing, as new organizing has not reversed membership decline and the financial and human resources poured into electoral politics have born no fruit. What has gone wrong?

Herman Benson: There are two aspects to this problem. The objective factor is that these are very tough times for the labour movement. Even with the greatest leadership in the world, the labour movement would still face very difficult problems: the problem of globalization, the complete transformation of the structure of the economy in the rise of service and decline of manufacturing sectors, and a general feeling of insecurity among workers. The reason why the United Auto Workers has not been able to organize a single foreign-owned auto plant is not because they don't want to do it or they haven't tried to do it. When you get down to it, the workers vote against them. And they vote against them not because they're anti-union, but because they feel that they have a certain security, which they're afraid of upsetting.

The other factor – I don't think it's the essential one – is the bureaucratic entrenchment in the labour movement. Because the leaders are bureaucrats, they are unable to capture the feelings of their members and mobilize them as an effective

political force. You hear the grand declarations from the Change to Win federation and others about America the Land of the Free, but when you get down to earth in the local unions, they're bureaucratic, they're mean, they're horrible to their members. Because there is such an entrenched bureaucratic quality to the labor leadership – even the best of them, the most idealistic, in SEIU for example – they are unable to summon the energy and enthusiasm of their own members. So these are the two factors: it's tough times and they're unable to utilize the powers that they have.

Macdonald: The Change to Win Coalition is an odd amalgam of unions with different political and organizing perspectives. What do you think has brought them together to disaffiliate from the federation?

Benson: This is a matter of speculation. First of all there is a feeling of frustration that we're not getting anywhere. This establishes a fertile field for people to try new things. Whatever the differences may be [between the AFL-CIO and the CtW], you can be sure that there will always be a wing of the labour movement that will have sordid reasons for doing something. Don't always look for something complicated. Why the Teamsters are in it [CtW] I'm not really sure. Only yesterday there was an announcement that the Operating Engineers are leaving [the AFL-CIO]. Why? I'm not sure, but it's got to be for

some shitty reason, knowing them. It's not because they have a new vision for the labour movement.

Macdonald: They say it's to better organize.

Benson: They say it's to organize, but nothing stopped them from organizing the day before yesterday. To believe that the Operating Engineers are doing this in the interests of the broader labour movement would be naïve. The same applies to the Carpenters.

But I think the basic reason for the split has to do with larger changes in the United States. We have two working classes – one which has achieved the American standard of living and the other that is earning 6 dollars an hour, mostly in the services sector. In the labour movement and in the broader society you have a genuine feeling that we have to do something for these poor, oppressed underdogs and bring them into the American way of life. These are the elements that the Change to Win Coalition is interested in. Not just the SEIU and UNITE-HERE, but also the Carpenters, who are now talking about shifting their focus from high-wage to immigrant workers who are earning below scale.

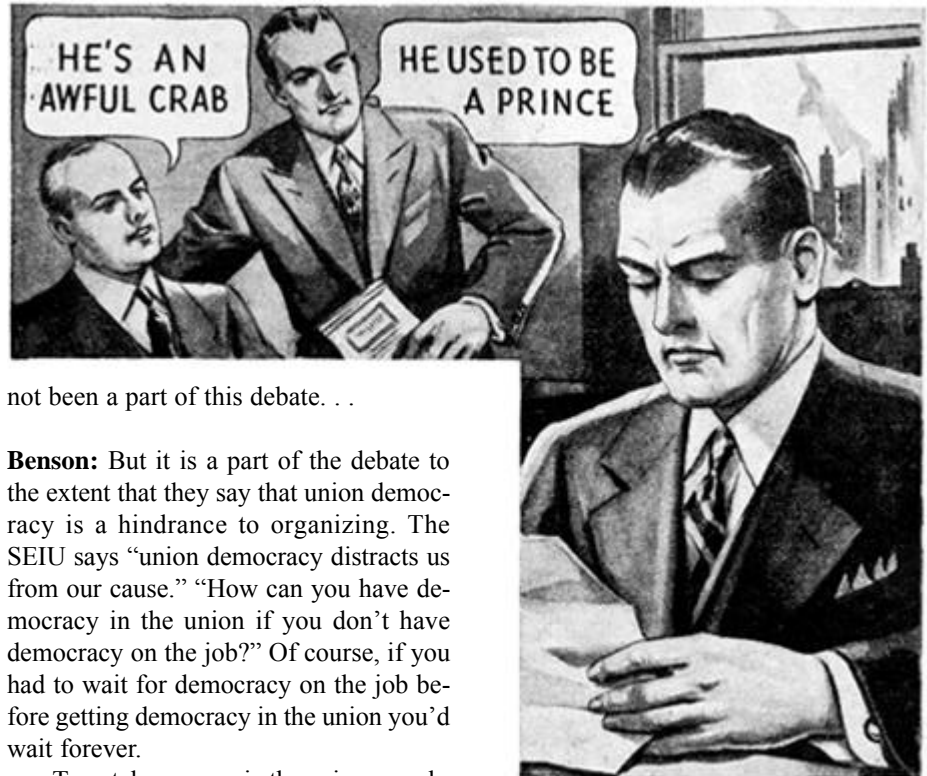
On the other hand, there is a much more powerful tendency that is taking those workers who have achieved the American dream and cutting them down. There is a drive to destroy the standard of

living of the American working class where it has been achieved – above all among manufacturing and transportation workers – and cut them down through wage reductions, two-tier structures, cuts to pensions. For me personally, this became vivid with the transit strike in New York. Transit workers in New York, mostly non-white and foreign-born, have achieved the American dream through their own collective strength. What's the response? This is a wonderful achievement? No – cut them down, fine them.

There are two currents of thought in America: where workers by their own strength have achieved the American dream they have to be cut down, and for those poor bastards who can't achieve it we have to give them a helping hand. The Change to Win coalition is within this second stream. They have been able to win significant public sympathy, and I don't want to denigrate this, but, at the same time, what the Change to Win people are doing is developing an ultra-bureaucratic conception of the labour movement. They want to take these poor workers, put them into huge locals spread across different states, sometimes with memberships of up to 16,000, in which it is almost impossible to organize independently of the officials. Their conception is of a small bureaucracy – sometimes of idealistic people, as in the SEIU – who are going to save these poor workers who they manipulate. That's what's happening right now.

The Carpenters have developed this to a science. The Carpenters have an incredible setup. They have poured all of their locals into regional councils. The locals have no rights except to elect delegates. The delegates elect an executive secretary, and the executive secretary has complete control over every staff position in the union. Locals can no longer hire their own business agents, only clerical staff. This concentrates enormous power in the office of the executive. And this is the tendency in the broader labour movement, especially among the Change to Win people.

Macdonald: The debate on rebuilding the US labour movement has focused quite narrowly on strategic organizing and new tactics, and secondarily on political strategy. The question of union democracy has



not been a part of this debate. . .

Benson: But it is a part of the debate to the extent that they say that union democracy is a hindrance to organizing. The SEIU says “union democracy distracts us from our cause.” “How can you have democracy in the union if you don't have democracy on the job?” Of course, if you had to wait for democracy on the job before getting democracy in the union you'd wait forever.

To get democracy in the unions, workers have to build caucuses and fight for good leaders and the ability to vote on contracts, and use every right that they have under the law, all the rights that they have in the union democracy clauses of the Landrum Griffin Act (LMRDA - 1959), use the courts, use the administrative agencies. And they must appeal to outsiders – including liberals – by making the point that union democracy is not just a labour problem but a problem of democracy in society. So organize internally, use your rights, and appeal to outsiders who sympathize with your cause.

On every one of these issues, generally speaking (not always) the union officials are against it. If you organize internally, the first question from the leaders is “how do we screw you?” If you go to the government, they say “what? you're going to the capitalist courts?” All of a sudden they become Marxists. If you go to outside support, they say “only within the union.” Restrictions against outsiders have become widespread. After the rank-and-file campaign in the Steelworkers in the late 1970s – something we were very involved with – the leadership passed a very complicated rule banning outside supporters, and it was copied throughout the labour movement. It was copied by the miners, by the electrical workers, by the

SEIU, and it's now become the thing.

Macdonald: You've argued in your book that the “union democracy clauses” of the Landrum-Griffin Act, which is usually seen as anti-labour legislation and often mentioned in the same breath as Taft-Hartley, were vital to the emergence of rank-and-file movements. But why would the US state in the 1950s want to promote union democracy? Still less, why would it now?

Benson: Government support for union democracy is a very mixed thing. On the other hand, some of the greatest success for union democracy has come with the backing of government. It was only with government supporting the rights of miners that they got rid of Tony Boyle, who was a murderer. The reason why Teamsters for a Democratic Union has been able to survive and why Ron Carey was able to win when he did was because the government stepped in and took control from the gangsters who ran the union.

To look upon the capitalist state as one monolithic mass is wrong. The Landrum-Griffin Act was passed as a result of an odd coupling of all kinds of →

tendencies. The union democracy clauses of the Landrum Griffin Act – Title 1 – incorporated the proposals of the American Civil Liberties Association. The labour movement opposed it. Among conservatives you do find some support for democracy – you have to accept that fact. When Ronald Reagan was governor of California, he supported a movement to have workers vote on their contracts. It was never passed. But the idea was that if the workers had a say, they would be more reasonable. At the time when the LMRDA was passed, conservatives looked upon the labor movement as a bureaucratizing force in society, and this idea emerged among liberals also as the labour movement showed itself to be more bureaucratic. There was also a feeling among conservatives that the rank-and-file were essentially good red-blooded Americans, and the leaders were a bunch of radical demigods trying to stir them up. If you only gave the workers the power to control their own institutions, they would curb the radical tendency of their leaders. So with that combination of conservative and liberal forces, you got the LMRDA. If the LMRDA came up today, it would never be passed. What's changed is the realization that you can depend more on the leaders to control the workers than you can on the workers. Workers who have democracy tend to make their unions more mili-

tant, more responsive.

Macdonald: If, as you say, unions are responding to today's difficult external environment by bureaucratizing and shutting down union democracy, what future is there for the U.S. labour movement?

Benson: It's rough. The future of the labour movement, and democracy within the unions, are tied in with political trends in the wider society. You cannot divorce them. In America you have a very close balance between the Right and, well, the Left. Whether you consider them the Left or not, the reality in American politics is that there is a very close balance between the right-wing conservatives and the liberal democrats. Even with his insignificant majority, President Bush goes to the extreme on the Supreme Court, the war in Iraq, torture. It's incredible.

The basic problem in America is political. The questions of globalization and health care are not going to be solved by organizing. You have a potentially powerful force in the organized labour movement. In order for that to be effective, however, the energies have to be released. You have to make these organized people feel that it's our movement. If you had a good portion of the 16 million organized workers telling their neighbours how great the labor movement is, that in itself would change the political balance in America.

And that's not happening because of the problem of democracy. You see it in one local after another. If you sit here in the office you get it on the phone. When someone stands up to demand their rights, the first thing that occurs to the leadership is "how do we get rid of them?" Instead of "how do we use this person's energy to rebuild the labour movement?" you have "We have to get rid of that person because he threatens our power." The basic problem is one of democracy.

After a couple hundred years, which have included devastating crises and wars that have wracked the world, the proletariat has not emerged as a class that is challenging power. That is a challenge to Marxism. The question from my personal point of view is this: If the working class is unable by its own efforts to maintain control of its own institutions, of its bureaucracy, how can it be counted on to take over society and guarantee the democratization of society? That's what got me, as a Marxist, so concerned with the issue of union democracy. In my experience, on the small scale on which I operate, the lesson that is clear to me is that the proletariat needs the backing of all of democratic society, not only to confront capital, but also to confront its own bureaucracy. **R**

Ian MacDonald is a York University grad student studying in New York.

"Aquí Estamos Y No Nos Vamos!": The Struggle for Immigrant Rights in the U.S.

William I. Robinson

Latino immigrants have launched an all-out fight-back against the repression, exploitation, and racism they routinely face in the United States with a series of unprecedented strikes and demonstrations. The mobilizations began when over half a million immigrants and their supporters took to the streets in Chicago on March 10. It was the largest single protest in that city's history. Following the Chicago action rolling strikes and protests spread to other cities, large and small, throughout the country. Millions came out on March 25 for a "national day of action." Between one and two million people demonstrated in Los Angeles – the single biggest public protest in the city's his-

tory, and millions more followed suit in Chicago, New York, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Phoenix, Dallas, Houston, Tucson, Denver and dozens of other cities. Again on April 10 millions heeded the call for another day of protest. In addition, hundreds of thousands of high school students in Los Angeles and around the country have staged walk-outs in support of their families and communities, braving police repression and legal sanctions. The message is clear, as marchers have shouted: "*aquí estamos y no nos vamos!*" ("we are here and we are not leaving!").

These protests have no precedent in the history of the United States. The immediate trigger was the passage in mid-March by

the House of Representative of HR4437, a bill introduced by Republican representative James Sensenbrenner with broad support from the anti-immigrant lobby. The draconian bill would criminalize undocumented immigrants by making it a felon to be in the United States without documentation. It also stipulates the construction of the first 700 miles of a militarized wall between Mexico and the United States and would double the size of the U.S. Border Patrol. And it would apply criminal sanctions against anyone who provides assistance to undocumented immigrants, including churches, humanitarian groups, and social service agencies.

Following the passage of HR4437 by the House the bill became stalled in the Senate. Democrat Ted Kennedy and Republican John McCain co-sponsored a "compromise" bill that would have removed the criminalization clause in HR4437 and provided a limited plan for amnesty for some of the undocumented. It would have allowed those who could prove they have resided for at least five years in the U.S. to apply for residency and later citizenship. Those residing in the U.S. for two to five years would have been required to return home and then apply through U.S. embassies for temporary "guest worker" permits. Those who could not demonstrate they have been in the U.S. for two years would be deported. Even this "compromise" bill would have resulted in massive deportations and heightened control over all immigrants. Yet it was eventually jettisoned by Republican opposition, so that by late April the whole legislative process had become stalled. It is likely that any further legislative action will be postponed until after the 2006 congressional elections this November.

However, the wave of protest goes well beyond HR4437. It represents the unleashing of pent-up anger and repudiation of what has been deepening exploitation and an escalation of anti-immigrant repression and racism. Immigrants have been subject to every imaginable abuse in recent years. Twice in the state of California they have been denied the right to acquire drivers' licenses. This means that they must rely on inadequate or non-existent public transportation or risk driving illegally; more significantly, the drivers' license is often the only form of legal documentation for such essential transactions as cashing checks or renting an apartment. The 3000 kilometer U.S.-Mexico border

has been increasingly militarized and thousands of immigrants have died crossing the frontier. Anti-immigrant hate groups are on the rise. Blatantly racist public discourse that only a few years ago would be considered extreme has become increasing mainstreamed and aired on the mass media.

More ominously, the paramilitary organization Minutemen, a modern day Latino-hating version of the Ku Klux Klan, has spread from its place of origin along the U.S.-Mexican border in Arizona and California to other parts of the country. Minutemen claim they must "secure the border" in the face of inadequate state-sponsored control. Their discourse, beyond racist, is neo-fascist. Some have even been filmed sporting T-shirts with the emblem "Kill a Mexican Today?" and others have organized for-profit "human safaris" in the desert. Minutemen clubs have been sponsored by right-wing organizers, wealthy ranchers, businessmen, and politicians. But their social base is drawn from those formerly-privileged sectors of the white working class that have been flexibilized and displaced by economic restructuring, the deregulation of labor, and global capital flight. These sectors now scapegoat immigrants – with official encouragement – as the source of their insecurity and downward mobility.

Immigrants and their supporters have organized through expanding networks of churches, immigrant clubs and rights groups, community associations, Spanish-language and progressive media, trade unions, and social justice organizations. The immigrant mobilizations have undoubtedly terrorized ruling groups. In April it was revealed that KBR, a subsidiary of Halliburton – Vice-President Dick Cheney's former company, with close ties to the Pentagon and a major contractor in the Iraq war – won a \$385 million contract to build large-scale immigrant detention centers in case of an "emergency influx" of immigrants.

The immigrant issue presents a contradiction for dominant groups. Capital needs the cheap and compliant labor of Latino (and other) immigrants. Latino immigrants have massively swelled the lower rungs of the U.S. workforce. They provide almost all of the farm labor and much of the labor for hotels, restaurants, construction, janitorial and house cleaning, child care, gardening and landscaping, delivery, meat and poultry packing, retail, and so on. Yet dominant groups fear a rising tide of Latino immigrants will lead to a loss of cultural and political control, becoming a source of counter-hegemony and of instability, as immigrant labor in Paris showed to be in last year's uprising in that European capital against racism and marginality.

Employers do not want to do away with Latino immigration. To the contrary, they want to sustain a vast exploitable labor pool that exists under precarious conditions, that does not enjoy the civil, political, and labor rights of citizens and that is disposable through deportation. It is the *condition of deportable* they wish to preserve since that condition assures the ability to super-exploit with impunity and to dispose of without consequences should this labor become unruly or unnecessary.

The Bush administration is opposed to HR4437, not because it is in favor of immigrant rights but because it must play a balancing act by finding a formula for a stable supply of cheap →

STATUS FOR ALL!

National Day of Action

Marches are being held Saturday May 27th

MONTREAL

12 PM at Phillips Square
(Ste-Catherine and Union)

TORONTO

1 PM at O.I.S.E. (252 Bloor Street W)

labor to employers and at the same time for greater state control over immigrants. The Bush proposal is for a “guest worker” program that would rule out legalization for undocumented immigrants, force them to return to their home countries and apply for temporary work visas, and implement tough new border security measures. There is a long history of such “guest worker” schemes going back to the *bracero* program, which brought to the U.S. millions of Mexican workers during the labor shortages of World War II only to deport them once native workers had become available again.

The immigrant rights movement is demanding full rights for all immigrants, including amnesty, worker protections, family reunification measures, a path to citizenship or permanent residency rather than a temporary “guest worker” program, an end to all attacks against immigrants and to the criminalization of immigrant communities.

A major challenge confronting the movement is relations between the Latino and the Black communities. Historically, African Americans have swelled the lower rungs in the U.S. caste system. But as African-Americans fought for their civil and human rights in the 1960s and 1970s they became organized, politicized and radicalized. Black workers led trade union militancy. All this made them undesirable labor for capital – “undisciplined” and “noncompliant.”

Starting in the 1980s employers began to push out Black workers and massively recruit Latino immigrants, coinciding with deindustrialization and restructuring. Blacks moved from superexploited to marginalized – subject to unemployment, cuts in social services, mass incarceration, and heightened state repression – while Latino immigrant labor has become the new superexploited sector. Whereas 15 years ago no one saw a single Latino face in such places such as Iowa or Tennessee, now Mexican, Central American and other Latino workers are visible everywhere. If some African-Americans have misdirected their anger over marginality at Latino immigrants, the Black community has a legitimate grievance over the anti-Black racism of many Latinos themselves, who often lack of sensitivity to the historic plight and contemporary experience of Blacks with racism, and a reticence to see them as natural allies.

The increase of Latino immigration to the United States is part of a worldwide upsurge in transnational migration generated by the forces of capitalist globalization. The corollary to the rise of an integrated global economy is the rise of a truly global – although highly segmented – labor market. Surplus labor in any part of the world is now recruited and redeployed through numerous mechanisms to where transnational capital is in need of it. Immigrant labor worldwide is now estimated at over 200 million, according to UN data. Some 30 million are in the United States, and least 20 million of them from Latin America. Of these 20 million, some 11 million are undocumented.

The anti-immigrant lobby argues that these immigrants “are a drain on the U.S. economy.” Yet the National Immigrant Solidarity Network points out that immigrants contribute seven billion dollars in social security per year. They earn \$240 billion, report \$90 billion, and are only reimbursed five billion in tax returns. They also contribute \$25 billion more to the U.S.

economy than they receive in healthcare and social services. But this is a limited line of argumentation, since the larger issue is the incalculable trillions of dollars that immigrant labor generates in profits and revenue for capital, only a tiny proportion of which goes back to immigrants in the form of wages.

If capital’s need for cheap, malleable, and deportable labor in the centers of the global economy is the main “pull factor” inducing Latino immigration to the United States the “push factor” is the devastation left by two decades of neo-liberalism in Latin America. Capitalist globalization – structural adjustment, free trade agreements, privatizations, the contraction of public employment and credits, the breakup of communal lands, and so forth, along with the political crises these measures have generated – has *imploded* thousands of communities in Latin America and unleashed a wave of migration, from rural to urban areas and to other countries, that can only be analogous to the mass uprooting and migration that generally takes place in the wake of wars.

Transnational Latino migration has led to an enormous increase in remittances from Latino ethnic labor abroad to extended kinship networks in Latin America. Latin American workers abroad sent home some \$57 billion in 2005, according to the Inter-American Development Bank. These remittances were the number one source of foreign exchange for the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, and Nicaragua, and the second most important source for Belize, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Suriname, according to the Bank. The \$20 billion sent back in 2005 by an estimated 10 million Mexicans in the United States was more than the country’s tourism receipts and surpassed only by oil and maquiladoras exports.

These remittances allow millions of Latin American families to survive by purchasing goods either imported from the world market or produced locally or by transnational capital. They allow for family survival at a time of crisis and adjustment, especially for the poorest sectors – safety nets that replace governments and fixed employment in the provision of economic security. Emigration and remittances also serve the political objective of pacification. As Latin American emigration to the United States dramatically expanded from the 1980s and on it helped dissipate social tensions and undermine labor and political opposition to prevailing regimes and institutions. Remittances help offset macroeconomic imbalances, in some cases, avert economic collapse, thereby shoring up the political conditions for an environment congenial to transnational capital.

Therefore, bound up with the immigrant debate in the United States is the entire political economy of global capitalism in the Western Hemisphere – the same political economy that is now being sharply contested throughout Latin America with the surge in mass popular struggles and the turn to the left. The struggle for immigrant rights in the United States is thus intimately connected to the larger Latin American – and worldwide – struggle for social justice. **R**

William I. Robinson is Professor of Sociology, Global and International Studies, and Latin American and Iberian Studies at the University of California-Santa Barbara.

Gregg Shotwell is a machine operator. He has worked at Delphi (formerly GM), the world's largest auto parts supplier's Coopersville, Michigan Plant for 27 years. He's also an intelligent, caring, and prolific writer and wry analyst of the world of work around him. He has for many years produced a regular critique of that world called "Live Bait & Ammo" (online at: www.soldiersofsolidarity.com). Thousands of auto and other workers read and respect Gregg and his LB&A postings.

The crisis surrounding the Delphi Corporation's attempts to radically restructure its U.S. Division at the expense of its workers and the communities that have supported it for many years has thrust Gregg Shotwell and many of his courageous Delphi co-workers into a new resistance movement called the "Soldiers of Solidarity (SOS)."

Robert Miller is the current CEO of Delphi Corporation. His mission is the radical restructuring of that company. His approach has been described as that of a "vulture capitalist" and evidence for that claim can be found among the wreckage of his previous corporate clients, including Bethlehem Steel. On Monday, April 3, 2006, Miller addressed the Detroit Economic Club and glibly laid out his rationale for the Delphi bankruptcy and its catastrophic aftermath.

Gregg Shotwell attended Miller's DEC Luncheon presentation and posted, in a 3-part series of Live Bait & Ammo's, his analysis of what the 'Miller Doctrine' will mean to workers and communities well beyond the ranks of Delphi workers. His analysis is also reflection on how the years of union collaboration and "jointness" have left the once powerful UAW incapable of launching a militant resistance to the most attack on its members since its founding days in the late 1930's.

For some corporate cheerleaders "Millerism" is capitalism's new frontier. For many other Americans his cynical misuse of the Delphi Corporation and the decimation of its domestic workforce is a harbinger of an acceleration of the downward spiral intended for many more millions of U. S. workers. Our U.S. Labor Movement, with its "an injury to one isn't necessarily an injury to me" philosophy, has slept through a number of 'wake-up calls' over the years, what the Delphi/Miller assault represents is a bell tolling for all. We all owe the Delphi workers, Gregg Shotwell, & the Soldiers of Solidarity our full support!

-Jerry Tucker, former UAW Executive Board Member

To Delphi Corporation's Robert Miller "Bankruptcy is a growth industry in America!"

Gregg Shotwell

While soldiers of solidarity chanted "Steve Miller's got to go!" I chewed synthetic lasagna warmed to room temp. I didn't eat anything that touched the meatballs - they looked like freeze dried Colorado oysters - and I eschewed the coffee which emanated an aroma reminiscent of high school biology class. A levy of polite manners subdued the normal aggressiveness of the free enterprise crowd but my appetite was in a self protective mode - wary and circumspect. I could have been described by security guards as the guy with "a small dark look in his face."

While the corporati wallowed in the warm sty of mutual flattery, the industrial landscape of Detroit disintegrated all around us and a cold rain descended on the luckless and the damned. The third world status of Detroit's inner city is emblematic of cities all over the United States. The deterioration is not accidental; it is not the by-product of capitalism's vaunted "creative destruction". The destitution was engineered for a purpose: to control labor costs. Solidarity House is surrounded by sweatshops.

On the dais Miller appeared to be enjoying himself. In Steve's World that's all there is to enjoy. Despite our differences, which are both wide and substantial, Steve Miller and I do have some points of agreement.

Point of Agreement #1:

No partnership between union and management

Unlike Gettelfinger who displays all the social movement of a chicken crossing the road (Must you ask why?), Miller makes no bones about the adversarial relationship between union and management. On October 8, 2005 Miller shot jointness right between the eyes. An obituary notice was nailed to the door post of every GM-UAW local union hall.

On March 31, 2006, when Miller petitioned the court to void the union contracts, I actually considered sending him a thank you card. Miller has done more to organize shopfloor resistance than anyone in the UAW.

#2: The problem isn't globalization

I agree. The problem is domestic. We have failed to organize and the litany of excuses can't withstand the scrutiny of history.

Was it easy when Walter Reuther got his head busted open at the Battle of the Overpass? Was it easy when he took a double barrel shotgun blast in the back? Was it easy when Victor Reuther was shot in the face and blinded in one eye? Was it easy for →

John L. Lewis to tell the Governor of Michigan that if he sent in the National Guard to oust sitdown strikers that "the militia will have the pleasure of shooting me, too."? It has never been easy. It has never been fair. The bosses have never been nice. We can talk partnership until the outhouse blooms roses, but it won't change the stink of the bastards in charge of our livelihoods. [Live Bait & Ammo #31: excerpt from a speech made at the 33rd UAW Constitutional Convention]

The UAW should have built a union hall across the street from every transplant in America. Instead we built a golf course at our Family Education Center in Black Lake, MI. Our UAW International reps have turned into caddies for "economic hitmen" like Miller, Wagoner, and Ford.

Miller said, "Globalization gets blamed for this outcome but it is only part of the story." The full story is, as Miller notes, less than 20% of the auto parts industry is organized. Only two of the foreign transplants located in the US are organized. Instead of organizing workers the UAW formed a partnership with the Corps. As a result, rather than taking workers out of the competition which is the goal of unionism, workers are subjected to "a competitive cost structure and modern operating agreements" which impoverish families and strip workers of their dignity.

Miller notes that transplants are competing "in our backyard with good pay and benefits and flexible work rules." He declares that "productivity has perhaps been more important than basic wage levels in overturning the established order." He conveniently ignores the enormous productivity gains of UAW workers. We make as many vehicles and/or parts as we did before with half as many workers. "Flexible work rules" is simply coded language for unrestricted authority to whip the horses, and purge solidarity, democracy, and equality from the workplace.

The competitive disadvantage of domestic auto makers in the U.S. is a consequence of the UAW's failure to organize which begs the question: Why would anyone want to join a union that is partners with the boss and bargains for concessions?

If the UAW doesn't take a stand at Delphi, a stand that unites GM and Delphi

UAW members and the broader community of uninsured and unsecured workers and retirees, the union busting plan embodied by Miller's brand of vulture capitalism will spread like an epidemic. Retreat is not an option when your back is against the wall.

3: Miller recognizes we need "Broader based health care programs"

I agree. Where we differ on health care is that for Miller it means transferring the cost from employers to workers. For soldiers of solidarity it means universal health care.

Miller said that when workers retired at "age 65 and then died at age 70.....the social contract inherent in these programs seemed affordable." In *The World According to Steve*, now that we stand a chance of actually enjoying our fair share of those benefits, it's unreasonable.

He explained that in the old days "employers passed along the costs to customers." But now "since their customers won't pay for it when they have choices," it's not viable. Miller asserts, "somebody has to pay" and it isn't going to be him and his gang of shrugging Atlases.

Miller's reasoning is fallacious. First of all, Toyota isn't selling vehicles cheaper than GM. So "choices" that customers make have nothing to do with health care or pensions. They make choices based on personal preferences, not an automaker's legacy costs. But more significantly, the customer is getting double billed.

As Miller explained, when the promises were made, the cost was shifted to consumers. Where is that money now? Rather than fulfilling their responsibility to retirees by setting the money aside in a trust fund, GM squandered it. GM like Delphi spent our legacy on assets overseas and extravagant compensation for executives. Now Miller proposes passing the legacy cost on to taxpayers so that consumers will in effect pay for the same thing twice.

If taxpayers are going to get stuck with the bill, the investment should have a commensurate return, i.e., health care for everyone not just the privileged few. Furthermore, the return should ensure a level playing field for all employers. National health

care is the only viable social-economic solution to the crisis in American industry and our communities.

If UAW members resist health care concessions and connect the struggle to all of the uninsured people in America, we may be able to leverage the automakers into support for national health care. The idea is not improbable. GM's 2004 annual report to stock holders stated: "...we need to encourage access to affordable healthcare coverage for all our citizens. It's simply not acceptable for over 45 million Americans to be without healthcare coverage. This causes a tremendous cost shift to those that do provide coverage, through higher bills to cover the costs of the uninsured."

Neither Delphi workers nor the UAW as a whole can succeed without broad public support. Such support will not come until the UAW is perceived as a partner in the pursuit of social and economic justice for all, not just their own members. The success of organizing in the thirties was due in part to the public's recognition that unions promote the common good. We will succeed in organizing and bargaining when the needs of the broader community dovetail with the goals of the union. Forty-five million Americans need our support.

The tide that raises all boats is social movement unionism; that is, a strategy of confrontation that links the struggle of one group with the struggle of all groups; a strategy of concerted activity that ensures a victory for one [GM-Delphi] is a victory for all; a strategy for striking action that rings the bell of liberty and justice in every American's heart.

Miller's attack is not confined to Delphi. His goal is the degradation of all working people. Miller insists we can no longer afford to pay good wages and benefits. Soldiers of solidarity see it differently. Our society can no longer afford extravagant rewards for fraud and incompetence. We can no longer afford to allow our legacy to be shipped overseas while our own citizens are deprived of a decent standard of living, quality education, health care, and security in retirement. We can no longer afford to support vulture capitalists. We can no longer tolerate the bullshit that pervades *The World According to Steve* by Steve Miller. **R**

Behind the Myth of Democracy

Jonah Gindin

*We own half the world Oh Say Can You See,
and the name for our profits is Democracy,
So like it or not you will have to be free,
—Phil Ochs, Cops of the World*

Over the past two decades, the U.S. has developed a new strategy of foreign intervention. While in some countries (Colombia, Afghanistan, Iraq) the U.S. is actively engaged militarily, and in others (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Uzbekistan) it continues to support undemocratic regimes, the U.S. now conducts the bulk of its foreign policy according to the logic of “democratic development.” This shift in emphasis, from support of dictatorial governments to support of ostensibly democratic ones, does not involve an equivalent shift in the interests governing U.S. foreign policy; the U.S. is flexible in pursuit of its interests.

“Democracy-building,” or “democracy promotion,” as the emergent paradigm is variously known, has arisen in tandem with the increasing weight of the global hegemony of market-capitalism. The connection between the two is no coincidence; as we shall see, the kind of democracy being promoted is inseparable from the promotion of economic “liberalization.” While “Democratic Capitalism,” to use Atilio Boron’s preferred nomenclature, has existed since long before the so-called “End of History,” the current era of proliferating “free-polities” and “free-markets” in the global south is the product of a particular phenomenon: what William I. Robinson has dubbed “polyarchy promotion.”

Though democracy is often conceived of as a political system based on popular sovereignty and participation, its most commonly understood meaning is a thoroughly streamlined version based on the Western democratic-capitalist model. Robinson describes this system – “polyarchy” – as one in which a small elite rules by confining mass participation to leadership choice in controlled elections. As movements for democratization in the 1970s and 80s gathered force around the world in concert with gathering opposition to the twin burdens of foreign debt and structural adjustment, U.S. policymakers were forced to re-evaluate their support for their authoritarian allies. The U.S. only began actively promoting polyarchy in the global south once it became clear that some form of democracy was an unavoidable development. From the beginning, it was an attempt to shape these transitions and their emergent political and economic systems; US “democracy promotion” activities have nothing to do with genuine democracy. At best, the U.S. is exporting an even more limited version of its own deeply flawed democratic model. At worst, “democracy promotion” is merely a smokescreen for the economic and physical violence of U.S. imperialism. For these reasons we will use Robinson’s more accurate “polyarchy promotion” instead of the misleading “democracy promotion.”

An array of governmental and non-governmental organizations, think tanks, universities, financial institutions, multilat-

eral agencies, foundations, and private corporations are polyarchy’s foot soldiers. The majority are from the USA, Canada and the European Union (EU), though they depend on local NGOs and civil society groups in countries on the receiving end of “democracy assistance” to facilitate their work. Leading the way for the U.S. is the Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). In 2003, USAID had a presence in 80 countries and the NED in 79. In 1980, the U.S. and the European Union each spent \$20 million on democracy-related foreign aid. By 2001, this had risen to \$571 million and \$392 million, respectively. In 2006, two analysts writing in the summer 2005 *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* projected the U.S. to spend \$2 billion on “democracy assistance,” while in 2003 – the latest figure available



– the EU spent \$3.5 billion.

Those on the left naturally skeptical of Western foreign policy in the global south, whether the rationale is “freedom,” “terrorism,” or “democracy promotion,” are unlikely to be confused by these rhetorical shrouds of Empire. Polyarchy promotion is designed, however, to be a well-camouflaged handmaiden to neo-liberalism – to throw the majority off the scent. Like any global strategy, polyarchy promotion is a complex, nuanced affair, given to considerable regional variation as well as the flexibility that stems from its inherently multilateral nature – the multiplicity of U.S.-based governmental and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and private corporations involved, and the plethora of other Western countries engaged in the “democracy business.” Partly for this reason, Latin America provides a particularly compelling focus, given the current climate of widespread popular opposition to neo-liberal economic policies represented by the mobilization of countless social movements, and the recent electoral successes of a host of left-leaning candidates on anti-neoliberal and anti-U.S. platforms. →

FREE MARKETS V. FREE PEOPLE

Polyarchy, as a political system, is designed specifically to facilitate a particular form of market capitalism. As Harvard professor and avid cheerleader for U.S. Empire Niall Ferguson noted in *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American*:

Think then of liberal empire as the political counterpart to economic globalization. If economic openness - free trade, free labor movement and free capital flows - helps growth, and if capital is more likely to be formed where the rule of law exists and government is not corrupt, then it is important to establish not only how economic activity becomes globalized but also how - by what mechanism - economically benign institutions can be spread around the world.

The political project of polyarchy - Ferguson's "liberal empire" - is inextricable from the economic project of globalization. In a speech to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco last May, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice illustrated this connection in the specific context of Latin America, arguing that, "To open a path for freedom in Latin America, the United States is offering economic incentives to advance political reform."

The success of democracy in Latin America depends on the continued openness of our hemisphere, openness to new ideas and to new people *and especially to new trade*. A region that trades in freedom benefits everyone and one of the highest priorities of this administration is to pass the Central America and Dominican Republic free trade agreement known as CAFTA. [Emphasis added].

Free markets, thus become a precondition for "democracy," and vice versa. In a similar vein, President George W. Bush explained this relationship in a speech celebrating the 20th anniversary of the NED in 2003, noting, "Eventually, men and women who are allowed to control their own wealth will insist on controlling their own lives and their own country." Yet, what evidence there is speaks strongly to the contrary.

In a recent article titled "The Truth About Capitalist Democracy," Atilio Boron argues that "Egalitarianism is the ideology, class polarization is the reality, of the capitalist world. Political democracy cannot take root and prosper in a structurally anti-democratic society." A cursory look at inequality in Latin America would appear to bear Boron out: some of the world's most unequal income gaps between rich and poor are getting worse. From the early 1990s to the early 2000s, the ratio of the share of per capita income obtained by the poorest five percent of the population compared to that obtained by the richest five percent increased in all but five of eighteen countries surveyed. In other words, the gap in income disparity widened during the 1990s in thirteen of eighteen countries. This is particularly alarming given that the ratio for the region was already 47 to 1 in 1990 (compared with 9 to 1 for OECD countries). This ratio rose to 52 to 1 by 2000 (OECD: 10 to 1).

This increase in inequality occurred at precisely the same moment that Latin American countries were beginning to feel the pinch of neoliberal policy prescriptions in earnest. A considerable literature has shown the detrimental effects of the structural adjustment policies of the 1980s and 90s. There is, then, little question that structural adjustment policies failed notably in narrowing inequality gaps in the region, and it would appear that these economic reforms are largely responsible for the widening of that gap. An Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) study titled "Poverty, Inequality, and Commercial and Financial Liberalization in Latin America," appears to come to a similar conclusion in acknowledging that, "Financial liberalization has had a significant effect in increasing inequality and poverty."



That this steady worsening of economic conditions for the regions' poorest residents has largely accompanied the institutionalization of polyarchal democratic regimes has not gone unnoticed by Latin Americans. A telling region-wide survey released in 2004 by the Chile-based polling firm *Latinobarómetro* reveals a startling decrease in Latin Americans' confidence in democracy over the past decade. When asked whether they agree that democracy is preferable to any other form of government, only 3 of 17 countries surveyed showed increases in their populations' support for democracy since 1996 (Venezuela: +12, Honduras: +4, and Chile: +3, and confidence in democracy in the region as a whole decreased by 12 points over this period.

The report further reveals that, when the entire 18,000 Latin America-wide pool was asked if they were satisfied with the functioning of the market economy, only 19% responded affirmatively - *and in no country of the region did this figure surpass 36% (Chile) of the population (Peru was lowest with 5%)*.

DEMOCRACY IN (PRO)MOTION

As noted above, the primary purpose of polyarchy promotion in Latin America has been the institutionalization of the neoliberal economic project. However, as a policy tool, the promotion of "democracy" has also been wielded to limit and control growing pressures for social and economic justice. Thus, "democracy" promotion strategies have been applied in most if not all Latin American and Caribbean countries to stack the hand of pro-U.S. (and pro-neoliberal) elites, against a growing political backlash against the "Washington Consensus" of pro-market

policies. In 2006, Latin Americans are going to the polls in many of the region's most influential (economically and politically) countries, and in many of these there are genuine challenges to the pro-market status quo. This "pink tide," has prompted increased levels of intervention on the part of the U.S. (and, to a lesser degree, Canada and the EU) in an attempt to staunch the flow of populist redistribution-oriented movements from achieving electoral power.

In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas (and a Sandinista spin-off: the Sandinista Renovation Movement – MRS) remain the parties with the largest popular support, and the U.S. and their Nicaraguan allies in the anti-Sandinista elite are once again forced to engage in scare-tactics and desperate coalition building to prevent a Sandinista victory. Last October, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick and newly appointed Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Tom Shannon visited Nicaragua. In a speech to the Nicaraguan Chamber of Commerce, Zoellick kicked off the 2006 electoral campaign a few months early, identifying the Sandinistas (and the hopelessly corrupt Liberal Party) as part of a "creeping coup" against democracy, and urged Nicaraguans to support the "Third Way," – pro-U.S. candidate Eduardo Montealegre. Zoellick's performance was merely the public face of a much broader intervention in Nicaragua that includes the financing of a variety of pro-market, anti-Sandinista Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and the International Republican Institute's (IRI) active role as cupid in shepherding Nicaragua's notoriously fractious anti-Sandinista elites into coalition (the only way they will defeat Sandinista candidate Daniel Ortega, or MRS candidate Herty Lewites).

Zoellick's intervention alone will undoubtedly have a profound effect on the electorate in the lead-up to Presidential elections in October of this year. Despite widespread antagonism towards U.S. interventionism among Nicaraguans, there is little confusion as to the degree to which the country depends upon the U.S. economy; remittances alone account for roughly one quarter of national income. During the 2004 Presidential campaign in neighbouring El Salvador, a variety of U.S. spokespersons repeatedly and publicly threatened to cut-off remittances if the Marxist former-guerrilla FMLN were elected (as they were widely predicted to do at the start of the campaign). In El Salvador, remittances from the US account for approximately US\$2 billion per year, or an estimated 70 percent of exports. This threat, made by then-U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador Rose Likins, then-Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere, Roger Noriega and representatives of both the House and Senate, was widely believed to have contributed to the FMLN's subsequent defeat.

In Venezuela, U.S. intervention has received considerable attention since several recipients of US "democracy-assistance," participated in a coup (quickly-reversed) against democratically elected President Hugo Chávez in 2002. Most notoriously, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) has funded Venezuelan NGO Súmate since 2000. Súmate director Maria Corina Machado was present during the swearing-in of dictator-for-a-day Pedro Carmona during the 48-hour coup in 2002. Súmate subsequently played a key role in conjunction with the anti-Chávez political coalition the "Democratic Coordinator," dur-

ing the recall referendum against President Chávez in 2004 (which he won with 60% of the vote). Last May, Corina Machado met with US President Bush, despite the fact that Venezuelan Ambassador to the U.S. Bernardo Alvarez has yet to meet with any senior level officials in the Bush administration.

CONCLUSION

In a recent article, University of Chicago professor Charles Boix argues that "excessive economic inequality, particularly in agrarian countries and in nations rich in oil and other minerals, exacerbates the extent of social and political conflict to the point of making democracy impossible." This has certainly been the experience of Latin America, where the arrival of "free-market democracy," exacerbated existing deep-rooted inequalities, leading to civil strife. Roland Paris made a similar observation in relation specifically to the pitfalls of peace-building operations in *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*.: "The transition from civil conflict to a well-established market democracy is full of pitfalls," argues Paris. "Promoting democratization and marketization has the potential to stimulate higher levels of societal competition at the very moment (immediately following the conflict) when states are least equipped to contain such tensions within peaceful bounds."

The World Bank has recently acknowledged the connection between economic equality and democracy. Guillermo Perry, World Bank Chief Economist for Latin America and the Caribbean, who co-authored a report on Latin America in 2003, admits that "To overcome the inequality that undermines their efforts to get out of poverty, poor people must gain influence within political and social institutions, including educational, health and public services institutions. To enable them to achieve such influence, the institutions must be truly open, transparent, democratic, participatory - and strong." The difficulty from the perspective of the Bank (and the US and global capital), is how to address this reality without truly handing over power to the poor. As *The Economist* noted at the time, referring to the 2003 World Bank report, "[social] policies may first require political reforms so that the voice of the poor carries equal weight to that of the rich, says the Bank. What it fails to say is how this might be done - while avoiding the characteristically Latin American trap of growth-sapping populism."

In essence, the champions of neoliberal globalization are at an impasse. Push too hard, and Latin America may be pushed to open revolt; not hard enough, and Latin America may find its own way to that revolt. "Development" in Latin America, will come with the arrival of genuine democracy predicated on economic and social justice. For those in opposition to US intervention in Latin America, and sympathetic to the region's attempts at autonomous, non-capitalist development, it is essential to distinguish between capitalism with a democratic face, and *real* democracy. Figuring out what, exactly, the latter is may be easier than it seems: if given the freedom to experiment with alternatives to democratic-capitalism, Latin Americans may develop a democracy truly worthy of promoting. **R**

Jonah Gindin is a journalist living and working in Venezuela.

DEMOCRACY PROMOTION & NEOLIBERALISM IN IRAQ

Adam Hanieh

The ‘spread of democracy’ is frequently advanced by the U.S. and British governments as a key justification for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. As with other regions of the world, however, U.S.-led democracy promotion is intimately connected with the spread of neoliberalism. As an explicit feature of democratization, the economic policies of the Iraqi Baathist regime have been rewritten under the tutelage of the USA, EU and international financial institutions. The aim of these new policies is to institutionalise a separation of economic decision-making from sovereign political structures.

As a part of this process, the U.S. government has outsourced the development of Iraqi neoliberalism to a private company, Bearing Point. Over the last decade, Bearing Point has been centrally involved in the development of neoliberal economic policies in regions earmarked for ‘democracy promotion.’ Following its first foray into El Salvador during the early 1990s, Bearing Point began work in the former Yugoslavia in 1999. Its work included the creation of a ministry of finance in Kosovo, and the development of privatization guidelines across the region.

USAID writes that in July 2003 it “began a program to build the capacity of the Iraqi Government to manage the transition from a command economy to that of one that is market-driven.” The aim of this program is to carry out the “...reforms necessary to help Iraq establish a policy-enabling environment that fosters private sector led growth.”¹ USAID awarded Bearing Point two contracts worth over US\$180 million to implement these measures.

Bearing Point’s contract with USAID required it to “... reform, revise, extract or otherwise advise on changes to the policies, laws and regulations that impact the economy... the contractor will provide ... macroeconomic reform advice, with a focus on tax, fiscal, exchange rate, monetary

policy and banking reform. Contractor will recommend changes to policies, laws and regulations that impede private sector development, trade and investment.”

In a remarkably frank outline of U.S. plans for the Iraqi economy, Bearing Point was required to “... assess state owned enterprises (SOEs) in Iraq in terms of their potential market value for sale as ongoing concerns ... [the] contractor will also evaluate and recommend the potential for liquidation or dissolution of specific firms or industries, as necessary.... Based on contractor recommendations (and approved by USAID), the contractor will implement a privatization plan, focusing first if approved on strategic investors and on creating and supporting an institution responsible for privatization.... If changes to legislation are required, contractor will assist legislative reform specifically to allow for the privatization of state-owned industries and firms and/or establishing a privatization entity. The contractor will implement USAID approved recommendations to begin supporting the privatization of strategic industries and appropriate privatization of public utilities, including potentially food distribution and agro-processing industries.”

DECENTRALIZATION & LOCAL GOVERNANCE

In the place of state control, U.S.-style democratization emphasizes de-centralization, devolution and local governance. While these phrases may sound liberating given the track record of centralized, undemocratic regimes in the area, in reality they hide atomization and massive disempowerment. When a country’s resources are passed into the hands of large international companies through a supposedly democratic mandate, no amount of neighborhood consultations can determine how those resources are utilized. Local governance in a context of centrally driven neoliberal austerity will most likely mean

a dismantling of public health, education and the introduction of fees for those least able to pay. Instead of building popular strength across a country, devolution of power in this context deliberately sets up different regions, groups, and individuals against each other – forced to compete for scarce resources. Fragmentation inevitably follows neoliberal democratization.

A central institutional player in this strategy is the U.S.-based private company, Research Triangle Institute (RTI). RTI has been awarded a very large number of USAID contracts around the world in countries such as South Africa, El Salvador, Benin, Uganda, Bulgaria, and Indonesia. Any doubts over the way decentralization/devolution is used to deepen neoliberalism are quickly dismissed through an examination of USAID’s *Decentralization and Democratic Local Governance Programming Handbook* (May 2000), written in close collaboration with RTI. The USAID handbook serves as a detailed recipe for promoting decentralization in a variety of different national contexts where there may be resistance to such methods. A central theme of the handbook is shifting responsibility for public service provision away from the state and towards local governments. The Handbook envisages a situation in which: “Local governments are doing more than merely cleaning streets; they are taking on a variety of non-traditional service responsibilities, such as assuring primary health care, basic education, public security, public utilities, environmental protection, and building regulation.”

In order to provide these services, local governments will be forced to raise their own revenues, and be given the power to introduce fees, privatize and borrow money on the international capital markets. According to the Handbook: “They may employ new or innovative approaches, including public-private partnerships, proactive participation in development programs with the national gov-

ernment or donors, and contracting out for services.” In doing so, revenue collection will be shifted towards the local level and will include the collection of fees for public services.

These identical themes are being repeated in Iraq. A 2003 USAID contract, awarded to Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and worth \$230 million to date, required RTI to: “Build sub-national administrative capacities to ... develop performance-oriented, transparent and accountable budgets; and undertake local economic development... and strengthen local authorities’ capacity to engage in discussions on appropriate devolution of responsibility to local levels of government.”

THE NED IN IRAQ

In his 2004 State of the Union Address, Bush requested a doubling of NED funding, from \$40 million to \$80 million, with all of the new funding to be aimed specifically at democracy promotion in the Middle East. While USAID and private companies like Bearing Point rewrite the economic rules governing Middle Eastern economies, NED’s role is to build an ideological base for such policies. Through its support for particular individuals and organizations that can effectively articulate a justification for these policies to a domestic audience, NED facilitates the necessary structural shifts under the mantle of democratic choice.

One of the NED’s ‘core’ institutes, the

Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), clearly illustrates this role. Established alongside NED in 1983 by the US Chamber of Commerce, the CIPE vision states “market-oriented and democratic institutions ... are essentially two sides of the same coin.” In 2004, more CIPE funds went to the Middle East than any other region in the world. Around 60% of these funds came from the NED and another 35% directly from USAID.

In the case of Iraq, CIPE notes that institutionalizing an independent central bank able to direct financial policy in the country is key to the neo-liberal process. In doing so, what matters is how the public *perceives* such structural decisions being made:

... it would be better if [the Iraqis] could come to that conclusion themselves. We’ve seen this throughout the world, that various decisions that the government needs to take tend to have more buy-in from the public if they’re perceived as having been made domestically rather than imposed by the international organizations that control inflows of capital.

CIPE programs in Iraq aim to promote this ‘buy-in’. In June 2004, CIPE launched its Fountain of Economic Freedom Radio to “serve as a platform for business people, policy makers, academics, media, and others to explain economic policy issues and

critically assess the progress of reform.” Another CIPE program in Iraq trains journalists to report on economic issues in order to “build support for market oriented economic policies.”

In July 2005, CIPE began broadcasting a weekly Arabic-language TV show in Iraq, Economic Files (Malaffat Iqtisadiyya), to further promote neoliberalism. The first episode, appropriately titled The Private Sector, presented an argument for the leading role of the private sector that is indistinguishable from the neoliberal positions discussed above. Subsequent episodes defend the importance of privatization, opening the country to foreign capital, and reducing public sector employment. The Economic Files is not a clumsy piece of neoliberal propaganda; it presents itself as drawing upon a range of opinions as well as street interviews airing the concerns of the ‘average Iraqi’. In this manner, The Economic Files works by presenting academic and government neoliberal supporters as having ‘expert opinion’ working for the good of the population. By limiting the range of debate to different shades of neoliberal policies, it serves to constrain thought within a narrowly defined neoliberal paradigm while presenting itself as an objective piece of economic journalism.

A further illustration of the link between NED-sponsored democracy promotion, US interests and neoliberalism is the Iraq Foundation, established in 1991 by a group of Iraqi expatriates living in the U.S.. In 2003, the Iraq Foundation received \$1,648,914 in funding from NED and the U.S. Department of State. This figure was a massive increase from the paltry \$265,000 the group received in 1998. Not only does the NED heavily fund the organization, but a former board member of the Iraq Foundation, Laith Kubba, is currently the senior NED program officer for the Middle East and North Africa.

At first glance, the public face of the Iraq Foundation appears to have little to do with neoliberalism. Its website focuses on democracy promotion in Iraq – displaying a concern for handicapped children in Iraq and constitutional and democratic rights. Digging a little deeper, however, reveals powerful ties between the Iraq →



Foundation and the neoliberal agenda. The two founders of the Iraq Foundation are merchant bankers and currency traders. One of these individuals, Basil Al Rahim, heads MerchantBridge, one of the most high profile investment banking groups in the Middle East. MerchantBridge was the first private equity fund to focus on the Middle East and in 2004 was appointed by the Iraqi Ministry of Industry and Materials to advise on the leasing of state owned firms to the private sector.

As to be expected from his background, Al Rahim has emerged as a strong advocate of neoliberal policies in Iraq. He has been a guest of the American Enterprise Institute and testified before the US Congress Joint Economic Committee (JEC) on the economic transformation of Iraq. In an economic paper for the Iraq Foundation, Al Rahim provides the classic neoliberal argument: "The fact that the [Iraqi] state (through nationalization and expropriation) owns over 80% of the productive economic assets of the country must be recognized and immediately addressed. It is only by shifting these assets squarely back into the private sector that the economy will be properly invigorated and set on a path of sustainable long-term growth."

Al Rahim's co-founder of the *Iraq Foundation* and its current Executive Director is another merchant banker, Rend Rahim Francke. Following the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Francke was appointed by the Iraqi Governing Council as its representative in Washington D.C. In 2004, she was a guest of Laura Bush in the First Lady's Box at the State of the Union address.

CONCLUSION

Neoliberalism is primarily concerned with removing a country's economic decision making from any kind of popular control. The greatest possible area of human activities must be commodified and brought under the sphere of the private sector. The role of the neoliberal state is to make sure this situation is sustained through the maintenance of property rights and the rules of the market place.

As Bush himself puts it, the cornerstones of US democracy promotion efforts in the Middle East are "free elections and free markets." The drive for democratization is inseparable from the implementation of neoliberalism. By making 'state control' synonymous with 'bad governance', democratization serves to legiti-

mate privatization, the dismantling of state sectors, and all of the miseries that inevitably follow in the wake of neoliberalism.

All of these policies require ideological sustenance and support. A plethora of democracy promotion NGOs, think-tanks and private companies are funded by US institutions such as the NED in order to make sure that those who think the right way come to power - and the rest of the population is sufficiently confused as to not get in the way.

Challenging these policies requires a rejection of liberal democracy's claim that politics and economics are separate. It is impossible to have any real political democracy without economic democracy. Democracy means being able to control the what, where and how of production and in whose interests this production occurs. The truth behind the myth of free markets is that they only provide freedom to the largest and most powerful corporations to make a profit. As long as free markets are synonymous with free elections, then democratization will also remain an elusive myth. **R**

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Syria's Transition to a Market Economy & American Power

Angela Joya

In 2003, the Bush Administration named Syria as a member of its 'Axis of Evil', alongside fellow 'rogue-states' Iran and North Korea. American hostility to Syria is nothing new. Syria has been on the USA's list of rogue states for the past few decades. Conventional wisdom has it that Syria is a closed society; that it is an authoritarian state that is economically stagnant; and that the Ba'athist regime is a threat to U.S. interests due to its support of 'international terrorism.' Is Syria the closed rogue state as claimed by the USA? How has Syria actually been responding to globalization pressures under former President Hafiz Al-Assad (1970-2000) and now under his son, Bashar Al-Assad?

After the invasion of Iraq in March of 2003, the U.S. Congress passed the 'Syrian Accountability Act'. This was immediately followed by U.S. economic sanctions on Syria. According to the USA, Syria was guilty of supporting terrorist groups and providing safe haven for organizations such as the Palestinian Hamas, the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). As with Iraq, it was also contended that Syria had developed weapons of mass destruction and chemical weapons. Finally, the U.S. pointed to the long term presence of Syrian armed forces in Lebanon as a violation of Lebanese sovereignty.

Since 2003, the U.S. focus has centered on Syria's alleged role in supporting the Iraqi insurgency and its role in the assassination of Lebanese ex-Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. A reading of the Syria Accountability Act clearly points to setting the grounds for an invasion of Syria with the intent of executing regime change. However, the unfolding of events and the outcome of the U.S. invasion of Iraq has suspended for now U.S. plans for Syria.

SYRIA'S MARKET OPENING

In all of this, very little is known about Syria. Syria has been undergoing a process of significant change, albeit uneven and complex. Indeed, reforms undertaken by Bashar Assad mark a radical break in Ba'athist rule in Syria. Even apart from the political and fiscal pressures from both the US and international financial institutions, Syria has opted for self-imposed reform in order to survive in a changing global economy and regional political landscape. Under the Bashar regime, Syria has been making a decisive shift from a statist economy to a neoliberal market one.

Since the time of the Ba'athist leader Hafiz al-Assad's seizure of power in 1970, Syria has in fact experienced three different phases of *infitah*, or economic liberalization. While many would argue that the gradual shift towards a market economy would characterize Syria as a capitalist country, the fusion of economic and political power in Syria tells us otherwise. Under the thirty year rule of the Ba'athists, the ruling party acted as the crucial lynchpin between a state and an economy that exhibited high levels of integration. Through politicized relations of clientelism, a large number of Ba'ath party members have assumed a monopoly over positions within the public sector, which in turn governs the economy.

Like many anti-imperialist regimes of the 1960s, the Ba'ath party sought to modernize a society that had been held down under colonial rule, even in the immediate post-war period, via a nominally 'socialist' strategy. This was in fact a statist strategy of development, with extensive state ownership of economic assets but within essentially capitalist relations of production that had not been transformed. The shift from the statist to liberal *infitah* period occurred due to a capital strike against the 'socialist' measures of the radical Ba'athist faction in the late 1960s. Responding to the interests of merchants and the private sector, Hafiz Al-Assad introduced policies to encourage private capital via repatriation of Syrian capital as well as to attract regional investors into the country. But the response of the private sector failed to invigorate the economy. As a result, the Syrian state had to extend borrowing in order to manage both fiscal and social problems.

The Ba'athist import substitution industrialization (ISI) strategies reached a complete impasse by the 1980s. Through the 1980s Syria witnessed a ballooning debt and an upsurge in social unrest. In response, the Al-Assad regime implemented a series of austerity measures including cuts to social spending, the elimination of subsidies of basic consumer goods in order to service the debt, and deepening of the coercive policies of the state. The fiscally conservative measures were accompanied by regressive tax increases on the poor coupled with tax breaks for the rich in order to stimulate investment.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s robbed Syria of a crucial economic partner and exacerbated the crisis tendencies of the 1980s. This merely served to hasten the pace and scope of economic liberalization. In an attempt to reorient itself toward the U.S. and the further projection of American power in the region, the Syrian regime implemented a series of reforms, on the domestic and foreign policy fronts. This included negotiations with Israel and supporting the first U.S. Gulf war in Iraq. In 1990, Hafiz Al-Assad introduced Investment Law No.10, which opened up a wide range of activities to the private sector. At the same time, the Syrian state reduced its role in provision of basic services. Cautiousness was the name of the game when it came to economic and political reforms in Syria. The unstable political situation and alliances in Syria prevented Hafiz Al-Assad from introducing even deeper economic reforms, especially on the fiscal front, at this point. However, by the mid-1990s, the impact of liberalization was clear: economic liberalization was not leading to increased growth, and poverty and unemployment were radically increasing.

THE PROCESS OF DE-BA'ATHIFICATION

With Hafiz Al-Assad's death, his son Bashar Al-Assad assumed power in 2000. Many analysts predicted in the 1990s that the end of Hafiz Al-Assad's rule would also mark the end of a fragile alliance that characterizes the Ba'ath Party. And so it happened. With Bashar Al-Assad in power, a rapid pace of economic reform began. The reforms faced opposition from the old guard of the Ba'ath Party. The radical shift towards a market economy in the 1990s, and then in 2000 under Bashar, effectively triggered a process of de-Ba'athification. The word 'socialist' was dropped from the Ba'ath Party constitution in 2003, and with it →

any and all commitment to 'socialism' which had begun in Syria in the 1960s, came to an end. This effectively meant an end to the statist development model and the adoption of neoliberal globalization. In a striking symbol of the regression of Syrian history, the pictures of important capitalists of the pre-Ba'ath era have been placed in the Parliament of Syria.

The de-Ba'athification process is significant for many reasons. First, it represents the dismantling of the planned economy, which occurred under the Ba'ath party that constituted the state. This also corresponds to the emergence of new classes who require a modern liberal democratic state in order to reproduce themselves and maintain their class power. The new class has its power mostly in the tourism, real estate and construction sectors, all of which had been groomed under Hafiz Al-Assad. It seems at the current historical period, the previously fledgling Syrian capitalists are now powerful enough to reorganize the state with an objective of integrating into the global economy.

The policies of de-Ba'athification mark a serious crisis both within the Ba'ath Party and the Syrian state. While Hafiz Al-Assad began a liberal phase in Syrian history, under his rule the Syrian economy stagnated. The Syrian regime willingly, if initially cautiously, embarked on a faster pace of market reforms in the early 1990s. The authoritarian and bankrupt regime that Hafiz Al-Assad fostered, and that the unimaginative Bashar took over, left few options. Without an alternative to the regime, a full embrace of the market economy represented the most suitable option to perpetuate the regime's power and to avoid a total economic crisis.

For other social groups in Syria, the adoption of neoliberal measures has not been particularly welcoming. The supporters of more radical political and democratic reforms have been shut out once again. Only for a short period in 2000-2001 when open political debate was allowed. The expansion of the sphere of the private sector has not resulted in employment levels that would correspond with the levels of labour market entrants. The withdrawal of the state from a redistributive role has resulted in five million Syrians living below the poverty line. Recorded unemployment levels are between 20-30%, with growing informal sector work and poverty over and above these numbers. While the IMF and the World Bank are welcoming the process of economic reforms and the integration of Syria into the global economy, they have demanded even further reductions of social and fiscal measures. But the market policies and the economic integration of Syria into the global economy are unlikely to continue to fail to produce the positive results that the IMF and the World Bank trumpet. All of this points to the sharpest contradiction of contemporary Syrian society. The shift towards neoliberalism and a market economy politically compromises the Ba'ath Party and its statist traditions, but it has become the only way for the Syrian state and ruling classes to extend their life. This leaves the Syrian regime more vulnerable to political upheaval, and thus reliant on coercive policies.

DEMOCRACY PROMOTION & US INTERESTS

What are U.S. interests in Syria then given its embrace of the market economy and economic orthodoxy? It is obvious that Syria does not have the military capability to threaten Israel or U.S. interests in the region. If anything, it is the remaining political independence of Syria and its remaining nominal defence of Arab nationalism, and thus the US lack of control over Syrian society, that is being objected to. Although the Syrian state has never hesitated to use its coercive powers, political debates are quite vibrant and global and regional issues are constantly discussed by Syrians, within the context of Arab nationalism. The U.S. project of democracy promotion and state-building are intended to remake the Middle East region, in terms of its state and economy and also its political orientations.

The U.S. roadmap is quite ideological and driven by its material interests. But it ignores the complexity of Syrian society and state, and the introduction of market reforms have accentuated social problems and not resolved them, and added to the coercive policies of the state. This strategy forgets that institutions develop over long historical periods and their stability being dependent on their relation with the concrete social relations that characterize a society. Even with the move to market policies and de-Ba'athification, Syria will not so easily be remade all American policy lines. But this of course leaves still open the enormous question of how an actually democratic and egalitarian Syrian might be made as all these social powers are seen as the spent forces they morally are. **R**

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The question of the reformation of the radical left has been a central agenda item in Canada and around the world since at least the early 1990s. Many would date it much earlier to the initial formation of a New Left in the 1960s, and others still earlier to the splits that emerged from the Stalinist turn of the organized communist parties in the late 1920s. But clearly the organizational challenge today for the socialist movement is of a qualitatively different order. The historical legacies of the past are receding into memory and the formation of an anti-neoliberal block of pressing urgency. Indeed, in Canada there is really nothing of organizational importance on the left that merits attention, except for some remaining magazines and the thousands of specific issue campaigns that the myriad of fragments on the left sustain. There are, however, several new openings in Europe that bear watching (alongside the dramatic upheavals in Venezuela and Nepal). They represent a new willingness by the left to begin to act creatively: not merely stating the NO of anti-capitalism, but also YES to a new socialist project. Hilary Wainwright, editor of the British *Red Pepper* magazine, has been writing on the making of a new left for many years, beginning with her contribution to *Beyond the Fragments* (1979) to her more recent *Reclaim the State* (2003). **Relay** here re-prints a recent analysis of Wainwright on the new Euroleft, alongside a series of other comments assessing left reformation. It is, of course, our view that that the left cannot avoid fundamental reformation, and long needs to get on with it, for the right is hardly waiting for us to catch a second wind.

The Emerging New Euroleft

Hilary Wainwright

From my desk in the north of England, the grass seems considerably greener-or the poppies redder-across the water in Europe. Here in Britain political look-alikes compete frenetically for the center ground, and politicians of the radical left are sidelined by a grossly disproportionate electoral system. In contrast, Norway's Left Socialist Party is part of the government; Italy's radical Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation Party, or PRC) is a key player in L'Unione, the coalition that could well defeat Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in this April's elections; Germany's Linkspartei (Left Party) potentially provides a new voice on the left; France's historically fissiparous left united to give the EU constitution a resounding European "No!" Ripples from this defeat of an arrogant political elite are evident in the confident way that young people presume they can block Prime Minister Villepin's attempt to neoliberalize the French labor market.

It's not all onward and upward. In last year's Spanish elections the United Left lost all its seats in the Madrid Parliament, partly because it was insufficiently nimble in the face of the move left by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's victorious Socialist Party, lifted into office on a wave of antiwar opinion. The Swedish Left Party is in disarray, while in Greece the relatively innovative Synaspismos is numerically overshadowed by the dogmatic and sectarian Greek Communist Party. But the political landscape of Western Europe is changing as disillusion with neoliberal policies grows.

Parties coming from varying combinations of Communist, Trotskyist and independent green-left traditions have long acted as a magnet for popular disillusion with mainstream politics.

But the constituency for an alternative to neoliberalism, whether Berlusconi or Blairite, is now far greater than any electoral support for the parties of the radical left. This constituency is reflected in opinion polls indicating majorities against both the Iraq War and privatization, in the popularity of muckraking films like *The Constant Gardener* and most of all in the continual eruption of resistance to governments pursuing neoliberal agendas, the French protests being the latest example.

Many of Europe's radical left parties are still struggling to develop new projects for social, economic and political change. Increasingly self-conscious about their own limitations, they are seeking to refound themselves by working with the radical social movements, organizations and networks that have gathered momentum in recent years. They face a Catch-22, however, because their efforts to innovate are in constant tension with the organizational imperatives of electoral politics. Yet without a more fundamental renovation – including giving way to the creation of entirely new political projects – they will remain in the minority.

The most successful parties on the European left are those that have immersed themselves in social movements, especially the movements for global social justice, while at the same time using electoral footholds to open up political institutions. What is happening across Western Europe is that significant swaths of public opinion have far more radical expectations than social democratic parties can meet, but most of these voters are slow to shift party loyalties. Consequently, it is through radical movements independent of the political system, from antiwar groups to trade union and community alliances →

against privatization, that this opinion is gaining organized expression. As a result, left parties that have strong links with these movements are able to punch way beyond their electoral strength, making gains for political ideas that the movements and parties share. "Social movements are the engines of transformation," says Fausto Bertinotti, leader of Italy's Rifondazione and the Mediterranean maestro of this strategy for outflanking conservative political institutions. Political parties must recognize that they are "but one actor among many," he insists.

Norway, with its uniquely proportional electoral system, provides a laboratory for the radical left's experiment with a pluralist approach to power. (By "pluralist," I mean a break from the idea that the party has a monopoly on the process of social change, and recognition of a plurality of sources of transformative power.) "The changes we have achieved would have been impossible without the pressure and initiatives of the movements since Seattle," commented Dag Seierstad of the Norwegian Socialist Left Party (SV), which split from the Labor Party in 1961. The SV provides the best Northern European example of this dialectic between party and movement.

The SV's twin-track strategy of working with a global justice movement closely linked to trade unions and campaigning electorally for a coalition of leftist parties, including a reluctant Labor Party, first bore fruit in 2001. The electoral consequences were ambiguous: The SV won 12.5 percent of the vote and twenty-three seats in Parliament, while Labor crashed to 24.3 percent and forty-three seats and actually lost the election to the Conservatives. But Labor's electoral collapse led the unions to start pushing for a coalition with the SV, rather than the center-right. When the left coalition won in 2005, the SV – a party committed not only to defending public services and public ownership but also to withdrawal from NATO – actually found itself in government, even though its share of the vote had dropped significantly, to 9 percent and only fifteen seats. The SV's presence in Norway's governing coalition has already stopped in its tracks the outgoing Conservative government's deregulation and privatization program. The SV can also claim credit for the reallocation

of Norway's oil surplus as development aid, the commitment to withdraw Norwegian troops from Iraq and the actual withdrawal of Norwegian special staff from NATO's Afghanistan operations.

The SV remains powerful because its presence provides a channel into government for movements that have their own social, economic and cultural strength. "Every day of the three-week-long negotiations, there were demonstrations outside that could be heard as we talked," says Seierstad. The demonstrators symbolized why the government must listen to the SV. This is the kind of dynamic that the PRC is attempting to reproduce in Italy. It has had some successes at the local level, gaining both

confidence and skill in this new kind of socialist politics. Isadora D'Aimmo, a PRC representative in the coalition government of the Left Democrats (DS) in Naples, describes how "the presence of Rifondazione forces the whole government to open the door to movements and to people's direct expression of their needs. Take a small but typical example: The regional government intended to build an incinerator in the town of Acerra. We disagreed and insisted on ecological ways of recycling waste. The people of Acerra revolted. They were supported by the mayor, who is a member of the PRC. It has been a revolt involving every citizen: men, women, boys, girls, priests. No incinerator has been built. That's how we work, with the movements to change the decisions of government and also the way they take those decisions." The parliamentary weight of the PRC on its own could never have achieved such changes in regional policy.

In the last national elections, the PRC won only 6 percent of the vote, but by opening the political process to popular participation it is trying to shift the balance of forces in favor of radical change. At the national level the aim therefore is not simply to form a united front against Berlusconi but also, through working relationships similar to those achieved locally, to keep constant pressure on any new government to break the logic of neoliberalism and find an alternative way out of Italy's deepening economic crisis.

An equal partnership with the movements becomes a necessary condition for radical social change. "We want to be a re-

source for the movements without trying to dominate them. It involves giving up on the sovereignty of the party," says Nicola Fratoianni, regional secretary of the party in Puglia, Southern Italy, where the PRC's gay Catholic Communist candidate won election as regional governor last April through a campaign whose momentum depended on the creativity and energy of local gay, youth and other social movements. The European Left Party (EL) was founded two years ago to bring together leftist parties across Europe. So far it is still a loose federation rather than a united political grouping, but it has been a catalyst in the chemistry of the reviving European left. "We learned a lot from the Italians," says Christiane Reymann, a



feminist in the leadership of the German Party of Democratic Socialists (PDS), now the dominant partner in the Linkspartei. "Their influence was vital to setting up the Linkspartei." Members of the French Communist Party (PCF) express similar enthusiasm for the EL: "The support of our partners in the EL was crucial to the success of the European 'No,'" says Elisabeth Gautier of Espaces Marx, a think tank associated with the PCF.

In both France and Germany, however, the dynamic between movement and party is less about government and more about strategies for survival. With its share of the vote down to 3.2 percent in 2002, the PCF risked extinction. For those in the PCF

whose goal was to change society in their own lifetimes rather than maintain a dying political machine, the only hope was to put their remaining resources at the disposal of those movements resisting France's version of neoliberalism. The innovators inside the party threw themselves into the campaign against the EU Constitution, where a strong grassroots movement joined them with even such traditional enemies as the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist League. But the momentum of last year's referendum victory will not be enough to overcome the deeply rooted sectarianism already re-emerging as the minds of the party loyalists turn to the presidential elections of 2007. Both left parties are reluctant to sacrifice the main opportunity on the French political calendar to promote their brand image in favor of a common candidate for the whole of the "alternative left." But the latest mass resistance is already breathing stronger life into the coalitions of the left, which were formed under different names across France during the fight for a European "No."

In France (and Germany too) the conservative institutions that movement activists, including many party members, have to outflank are those of the parties of the left. In Germany the crisis of politics following unification has presented the anti-globalization movement and the anti-neoliberal trade unions with a political opportunity for a radical political voice but also with a tough challenge. The Linkspartei is to some extent a very precarious marriage of convenience: The PDS, though popular in the east, faced a slow death as long as it remained in its eastern ghetto lacking any representation in the Bundestag. Meanwhile, in the western part of the country, a significant group of regional trade union leaders and engaged intellectuals led by former economics minister Oskar Lafontaine split from the Social Democratic Party to form the Election Alternative for Employment and Social Justice. They came together initially as an electoral alliance and surprised themselves by winning 8.7 percent of the vote and fifty-four seats in the Bundestag in last year's elections.

The leaders of the Linkspartei talk the talk of working with the movements, but I doubt if many of their leaders would really accept the proposition that they are just "one actor among many." There is, however, a significant minority who have been genuinely influenced by their involvement in the new movements, including the networks that are spreading through the European Social Forum. They complain of the overly "managerial" approach of the party leadership, who patronize the movements and curb open discussion and autonomous initiatives inside the party.

The strategy of opening parties and political institutions to social movements seeks to release new and powerful forces for political change. Three current trends support it: First, the continuing, though fragmented, resistance to various aspects of neoliberalism, whether privatization, deregulation, bureaucratically imposed development plans or war. Second, the failure of sclerotic and often corrupt political institutions to represent or debate this widespread popular feeling adequately. Third, the European context itself, which produces a rich cross-fertilization of ideas and political cultures. Who knows, someday it might even shake the institutions of the British establishment. Indeed, with the Scottish Socialist Party now eight years old-with six seats in the Scottish Parliament and strong roots in Scotland's radical movements-the politics of pluralist transformation already has a foothold even here in Britain. seats in the Bundestag in last year's elections.

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The Difficulties of Building a New Left in Germany

Thomas Sablowski

Hilary Wainwright presents a relatively optimistic account of the development of the left in Europe, centred on the recent interaction between social movements and left parties in some European countries like Norway and Italy. For sure, the dialectic between left parties and social movements is a key issue for the development of a socialist strategy. It is certainly true that an opening of traditional left parties (and trade unions, I would add) towards the social movements is necessary to overcome bureaucratisation and the limits of parliamentary and institutionalised politics on the terrain of the state more generally. However, a critical view is not only necessary with regard to parties, but also to social movements. It is simply not realistic to expect that a permanent mobilisation of movements could provide the necessary pressure on left parties within government coalitions to block neoliberal attacks or to realize progressive reforms step by step. Social movements come and go. They can't be permanent. For instance, in Germany the formation of the "Election Alternative for Employment and Social Justice" (WASG) gained momentum *after* the social justice movement in Germany had already gone into crisis following its defeat in the massive struggle against the labour market reforms of the "red-green" government. The Left Party/PDS succeeded with the support of the WASG in the national elections 2005 after a cycle of movement had come to its end.

Compared to the massive mobilisations between fall 2003 and fall 2004, the movements in Germany today are still cooking on a low heat. It is also important to notice the unequal development of movements within Europe. There have been attempts for joint action at the European level, for instance against the "Bolkestein directive" which aimed at the complete liberalisation of services in the

EU. But it is evident that the mobilisations at the national level are usually much stronger than at the European level. While we have a strong protest movement in France right now, a key problem of the current situation in Germany is to figure out how a new cycle of movements could be initiated. The left parties could play an important role in this regard, but they seem to be absorbed more or less by electoral politics and internal quarrels.

We could just see how precarious the success of the Left Party in 2005 was. It did not indicate a consistent shift of the balance of forces to the left. In this month's local elections in the state of Hesse the voter turnout reached a new historical low (45.8%); and the Left Party got on average 3.8% of the votes, compared to 5.3% in Hesse and 8.7% nationwide in last year's national elections. The conservative CDU could consolidate its role as the party of the relative majority within the German party system. The Social Democrats lost heavily again. Moreover, there are still no signs that the Social Democratic Party could break with neo-liberalism. Indeed, it's not all onward and upward.

We cannot overlook the fact that the core of activists in the social justice movement is very limited. Attac, the strongest organisation within the German social justice movement, has about 16,000 members. (The WASG is even smaller with 12,000 members.) The leadership of Attac is well aware of the limits of its organisation, that's why it has focussed on building alliances primarily with the trade unions and other organisations in civil society. Indeed, if we talk about the perspectives of political change in Germany and Europe, we have to take into account not only left parties and the social justice movement, but also the trade unions. Although German trade unions have lost 5 million members since the early 1990s, with about 7 million members they still

remain the biggest and most relevant organisations of workers. The most relevant struggles in Germany today are the strikes and collective bargaining processes carried out by workers and trade unions. At stake are not only economic issues like the defence against job losses, longer working hours and wage losses. In the present situation any economic struggle has repercussions in the political balance of forces. At present, German workers are hardly able to defend their basic economic-corporative interests, let alone to be protagonists of an alternative hegemonic project. They can envisage the latter only if they are able to achieve the former. In any case we have to think not just about the dialectic between social movements and parties, but rather about the "trialectic" between social movements, left parties and trade unions. The interplay of these forces is decisive because any one of them in isolation is too weak to change anything.

Wainwright talks about "radical left parties" and "radical movements." But, at least in Germany, neither of the forces involved is necessarily anti-capitalist. The problem is precisely that capitalist hegemony characterises even the attempts to organize an opposition against neo-liberalism. "Another world is possible!" was the slogan of the social justice movement, but neither Attac nor the WASG or the Left Party nor the trade unions in Germany really have a consistent idea of how another world is possible. At best we can get a kind of Keynesian reform programme today. But neoliberalism has even invaded the trade unions, and the Left Party practically carries out neoliberal politics where it participates in regional and local governments. Thus, the struggle for a political-ideological re-orientation has to take place not least within the left parties and within the trade unions. All these forces are in a very precarious condition right now.

Whether the merger of the WASG and the Left Party/PDS will succeed and give rise to a stronger party is not clear so far. Primarily in the WASG, there is growing internal opposition against the merger. On the one hand, the Left Party has a lot more members at the federal level, so that the members of the WASG would be just a small minority within the new party and in danger to be marginalized. On the other hand, the unwillingness of the Left Party to critically discuss its local and regional government policy, and to accept some criteria for supporting or exiting coalition governments, raises the anger of many WASG members. Especially in Berlin, the role of the current government of Social Democrats and the Left Party is very problematic. Berlin is in a severe fiscal crisis, but the government further aggravates the situation by its politics. Thus Berlin even became a forerunner of neoliberal reforms

at the state level, cutting social services, privatizing public utilities, quitting the employer association and existing collective bargaining agreements, and lengthening the working time of civil servants. The WASG in Berlin strictly opposes a merger with the PDS as long as the latter isn't changing its politics at the state level. The merger will probably take place, but how many people will be lost on the way? It's quite obvious that there's already an enormous "normalisation" pressure. The discussions about the merits of oppositional politics or participation in government remind me of similar discussions in the early years of the Green Party, only that the "normalisation" of the new left party might take place much quicker, given that there is little critical discussion on party structures, the dynamics of parliamentary politics and the possibilities of alternative forms of organization.

However, I basically agree with the idea that a left party could play a productive role if it is able to develop a politics – not only within the state apparatuses but also at a distance from the state – and if it encourages and supports mass movements. The emergence of the WASG has already had positive effects within the trade unions and party system in deepening the contradictions within the power bloc. Without the WASG we would probably have a government of the Christian Democrats and the Liberals today, which would enact even more radical neoliberal "reforms" than the current grand coalition is able to. **R**

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What 'Success' Means for the Emerging Euroleft

Joel Davison Harden

Thus the awakening of the dead in those revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given task in the imagination, not of fleeing from its solution in reality; of finding the spirit of revolution once more, not of making its ghost walk again.

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

Hilary Wainwright's recent writing on the 'emerging Euroleft' – a term referring to Europe's new radical political parties – has given many pause for thought in thinking through the relationship between elections and today's global protest movements. Given the impact of activist mobilizations in Europe, she insists, there is an audience for anti-neoliberal ideas in elections beyond the 'usual suspects' of the far left. In this environment, the emerging Euroleft faces a stark choice: either parties let the energy of contemporary anti-capitalism remake them, or they hold fast to the view that party leaders call the shots. The price of the second path, Wainwright claims, is the continued marginalization of radical politics. The most successful parties – and here she takes readers on a brief tour of at least four examples – are those open to the first path, and willing to change given the imprint of recent global radicalism.

There is much to agree with here. In many respects,

Wainwright's case is reminiscent of Marx's view (cited above) of what socialists learned from the elite-led revolutions of 1848. Like Marx, Wainwright urges readers towards the creative use of radical ideas rather than a cookie-cutter approach to social change. For her, as it was for Marx, an ounce of pragmatic radicalism is preferred to a pound of left doctrinal purity. True revolutionaries are those who make the most of their historical conditions, and apply a tactical use of radical ideas and activism to change society. Those unwilling to do so, the argument goes, prefer being big fish in diminishing far left ponds. These true believers die content having lived a life of theoretical consistency, a fetish Emerson once described as 'the hobgoblin of little minds'.

Having agreed with Wainwright's case for open-minded radicalism, then, what is the 'given task in the imagination' – to coin Marx's phrase – today's global protest movements pose for the emerging Euroleft? What can peace and global justice sympathizers offer the left in parliament, or the left seeking to gain office? In short, how can today's radical movements redefine 'success' for the emerging Euroleft, allowing it to 'punch beyond its electoral weight'?

Wainwright's answer appears to be this: 'success' is most likely if the Euroleft embraces the anti-neoliberalism and anti-imperialism of today's radicals, seeks the greatest potential unity in elections, and demonstrates a grass-roots, democratic →



alternative to the stodgy confines of electoral politics. On the surface, this appears as a wish-list to which many would subscribe.

A few gaps appear, however, with a closer look at Wainwright's version of 'success'. Though she speaks at length about opposition to neoliberalism, there is little assessment of how committed the emerging Euroleft is to embracing this as a defining part of its platform. We are taken on a tour of various parties praising recent global radicalism, but see little indication of how an anti-neoliberal and anti-war approach gets used by the party in any systematic way. It is well and good to praise those parties open to the influence of today's radical movements, but activists need to see proof – beyond inspiring anecdotes – that the party will act as a genuine mirror for its interests.

In this sense, the example of Italy's Rifondazione (PRC) is instructive. If the PRC's embrace of Romano Prodi's l'Unione involves any endorsement of neoliberal reforms (as Prodi espoused during the late 1990s), the base of Italian radicalism will likely go the sorry route of the Brazilian left. That kind pragmatism only leads to demoralizing the radical spirit engendered by today's upstart protest movements. In Italy, this conclusion may be approaching sooner than most non-Italians realize, though I certainly hope to be wrong.

Instead of seeking compromise with its rulers, the emerging Euroleft should act as a mirror of radical social movements, and reflect the image of global justice in the arenas of capitalist commonsense. As Wainwright explains, this appears to be happening in much of the Euroleft. In parliament, neoliberals should see the Euroleft as the radical street-based movement it loathes. In the streets, activists should see in parliament, at long last, an image of themselves. Altogether, the movement's presence and message is the issue, not the size of the radical delegation in parliament. Elections are used to build support for radical politics, and not the other way around.

This approach to elections can break through the neoliberal husk of sanctioned politics that David Harvey, in his *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), has documented with disturbing precision. It can urge activists to get involved in elections as actors with attractive ideas, not citizens duped into voting for 'lesser evils'. It can present a message of hope for the alarming number choosing not to vote at all. Such 'success', however,

must involve rejecting the logic of neoliberalism tout court, and creating space for action and debate on how best to change society. It also means urging a Euroleft of diverse persuasion, where anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ideas can dialogue with others inclined to less strident views.

Such an approach, however, means addressing the tension Wainwright cites recognizes between elections and radical movements. It also involves rejecting the prevailing definition of electoral success widely-held on the left, that more seats in parliament is an indication that radical movements are being heard. More important, I think, are the ideas and practices brought to parliament. On this score, it is worth

briefly raising one example within the Euroleft that doesn't make Wainwright's shortlist: George Galloway and the RESPECT 'unity coalition' he represents in Britain.

Wainwright passes over RESPECT with an off-hand remark about the UK's 'grossly disproportionate electoral system'. As someone living under a British-inspired parliament, I can identify with such constraints, but they have not stopped RESPECT and Galloway from using the very approach to elections endorsed above. After the July 7, 2005 bombings of the London Underground, Galloway showed the courage to act as a mirror for the sentiments of millions (perhaps billions), and declare Tony Blair's support for US militarism had made Britain a terrorist target. Earlier, when Galloway testified before a U.S. Senate Committee, he showed the chutzpah to turn the tables on his inquisitors, and publicly indict the Bush Administration for its crimes in Iraq. Galloway and RESPECT are not without foibles, but they have, by their words and deeds, created a new activist basis for renewing the British left. Importantly, this 'success' has not come through seeking coalitions with Liberal Democrats or others keen on capturing the state through elite compromise. Instead, it has come by appealing to those disenchanted with politics through a positive message to change the way parliament works altogether.

To be sure, the opportunities for radical politics today are tremendous in Europe and elsewhere, and must involve reaching out beyond the existing left. Rebuilding the global left, in this sense, means more than regrouping the usual suspects who've built the same events and demonstrations for the last three decades. It involves creating new alliances with those opposed to the aggressiveness of capitalism's neoliberal turn, and using this space to popularize anti-capitalist ideas. A better world is indeed possible, and Wainwright deserves praise for suggesting parliament remains one viable place where that world can be fought for. Still, how politics is done matters. To that end, Wainwright's emphasis on participatory democracy and anti-neoliberalism should define 'success' in the short-run for the emerging Euroleft. **R**

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The New Euroleft & Anti-Capitalist Strategy

Sebastian Lamb

Hilary Wainwright is absolutely right about the importance of the “continuing, though fragmented, resistance to various aspects of neoliberalism” in Western Europe. In fact, it has just been taken to a higher level by the recent victory of the mass movement in France against the government’s attack on the rights of young workers. This resistance has opened new possibilities for the left.

In this situation, Wainwright suggests that what’s most important for the left is a “strategy of opening parties and political institutions to social movements” that “seeks to release new and powerful forces for political change.” Wainwright is hopeful that left parties that have “an equal partnership with the movements,” win seats in parliament and participate in governments can translate movement power into influence and change in government policy and practice. This raises important issues that deserve discussion and debate. In the space available, I will focus on one.

Recent events in Italy show where pursuing a strategy like the one Wainwright favours can lead. The Fausto Bertinotti leadership of the Party of Communist Refoundation (Italian initials

PRC), of which Wainwright’s article is uncritical, would say that it is pursuing just such a strategy.

The PRC was pushed in a more radical direction by the global justice movement that showed its strength in the mass protests in Genoa in 2001. When this did not lead to a leap in PRC support at the polls, Bertinotti and co. swung right. Reaching back into the Stalinist “Communist” political tradition from which they have not completely broken, they won the PRC to support for forming an alliance with the Italian parties of what in Europe is called the “social liberal” left (the “left” that has accepted neoliberalism). This is a revival of what has traditionally been called a popular front strategy.

The PRC entered the “centre-left” Union alliance, whose programme accepted neoliberalism and whose candidate for prime minister was Romano Prodi – an architect of the integration of Europe on neoliberal terms. A leading member of a revolutionary socialist minority in the PRC was removed from the PRC’s list of candidates. Union won the elections in April 2006, and the PRC declared “We will support a government with Romano Prodi

as a prime minister and our party will take part in it.”

The stage now appears set for the PRC to be part of a government that will run capitalist Italy and – *at best* – enforce a relatively mild version of neoliberal discipline. Bertinotti and co. will likely end up using PRC influence to prevent movements from mobilizing against the government, just as much of the left wing of the Workers’ Party (PT) has done since Lula’s election in Brazil. We can only hope that many PRC members refuse to compromise with neoliberalism, like the radicals in the PT who were forced to create a new socialist party, PSOL.

For everyone in Europe who wants to help build “a coherently anti-capitalist left” (to use a phrase from the Critical Left minority current in the PRC), the way forward lies in strengthening movements and struggles *against* capitalist governments, not participating in them. **R**

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Is the Party Over?

Gregor Gall

More than 350 Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) delegates met in early March for their annual policy gathering. The conference marked Colin Fox’s first year as the party’s national convenor. (The SSP is moving away from the idea of a single ‘leader’ since the resignation of Tommy Sheridan on 9 November 2004.) The party has traveled a rocky road over the past 18 months. Continuing financial difficulties, poor results in the general election and three by-elections, the public backlash over its MSPs’ direct action protest at the G8 summit, together with party infighting, all seemed to have consigned the SSP to the dustbin of history. So is the party really over for the SSP?

Even the most faithful SSP members admit there have been

recent troubles, but there’s no consensus over the causes. Some argue it’s merely the establishment response to the 2003 parliamentary breakthrough (when the SSP went from one MSP to six). Others stress the diversion of energies resulting from the party’s enlarged parliamentary presence; or the result of relying too much on one high-profile, charismatic individual. Among some of the organized internal platforms (a distinctive feature of the party, and no doubt one of the reasons that it has been able to unite so much of the left, is that members have the right to form political tendencies), the woes are the result of becoming a ‘nationalist’ and ‘reformist’ party. What has happened, and does happen, to the SSP matters →

to the left far beyond Scotland. This is because the SSP has achieved five critical steps towards the renewal of the socialist project in Britain.

- *First*, it has united the far left in Scotland – with the exception of the 200 members of the Communist Party and its Labour left co-thinkers such as the Campaign for Socialism.
- *Second*, it has attracted into membership hundreds of disillusioned activists from Labour and the SNP, as well as many people never before involved in left-wing politics.
- *Third*, it has established an organic relationship with a milieu of radical thought in Scottish society, the size of which varies from 40,000 (in the 2005 general election) to 130,000 (in the 2003 Scottish elections).
- *Fourth*, the SSP has gained a national platform from which to agitate and organize around its agenda and support various non-SSP campaigns.
- And *fifth*, the party has learnt from the failures of the radical left in many important respects. It has been able to move from general socialist argument to practical proposals on bringing the railways back into public ownership; introducing free prescriptions and free school meals; and replacing the council tax with a local income tax based on the ability to pay – around all of which the SSP built both parliamentary alliances and street-level campaigns. It has created a party culture founded on a deeply rooted belief in democratic debate and the value of diversity.

All of this has enabled the SSP to establish a national presence throughout Scotland, with 3,000 members organized in 86 branches; a national and local media presence; and its own weekly 12-page newspaper with a staff of four, as well as 20 other party and parliamentary workers. The number of regular activists is probably around 400-500 members. To imagine what this means in English terms, what the SSP has achieved needs to be multiplied by a factor of ten to get some idea of how embedded it has become throughout Scotland. Of course, many will say that most of the SSP's success has been the gift of proportional representation – to which there is some truth. But the ability to take advantage of PR is something else and goes back to a careful process of building trust across a diverse spectrum of the left – political organizations and social movements – and working together both on specific campaigns and on building a common organization. New thinking was combined with joint work resisting privatization and cuts, building on the legacy of the anti-poll tax work that went before. The SSP emerged out of two predecessors: Scottish Militant Labour (SML) and the Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA). Militant in Scotland took its 'Scottish turn' after many of its members were expelled from Labour; it also understood that it needed to operate as an independent organization and break from vanguardist notions of a political party. This, in turn, involved standing in elections and relating to the desire of a long-established current of thought in Scotland for devolution.

When the SSA proved relatively successful in terms of cam-

paigning activity, growth and profile, and with the Scottish Parliament elections looming in 1999, the SSP was established in 1998 to take the project further. This was rewarded with Tommy Sheridan's election as a list MSP for Glasgow. His tireless and high profile work between 1999 and 2003, in the context of rising social struggles, gave the SSP a good platform for the 2003 breakthrough.

The crux of the SSP's current problems is its credibility and the goodwill towards it, both of which have been eroded since 2004. The leadership debacle provided opposition parties and the media with an open season. But the reason why this onslaught has been so effective is that the SSP was not in a good state to withstand it. The dynamics of its own enlarged internal organization, the shifting of its centre of gravity towards the Scottish Parliament, the considerable resources required to operate there, and members withdrawing from activity after the successes of 2003 (there was something of an attitude of 'We've made it, now it's up to the MSP's') have all demobilized the SSP.

On top of this, the absence of the same social struggles as previously has exposed the susceptibility of the SSP to the underlying political conditions. The 2007 Scottish election is widely seen as 'make or break' for it. Standing still would represent a triumph, while losing its MSPs would set the SSP back many years by dint of the ensuing demoralization and disorientation. Some success in the council elections, where the SSP will benefit from the newly introduced proportional representation, may offset this.

Politically the SSP is not adrift. Its 2006 conference showed a mature and considered approach to grappling with the issues it faces over electoral strategy, Scottish independence, crime and justice and pensions, among others. The detailed nature of the debates, drawing on the daily experiences of working class communities, was impressive.

On electoral strategy, the SSP will focus more heavily on list, and not constituency, seats. Inside the Independence Convention, the SSP will work with others to promote its commitment to Scottish independence, but without diluting its socialist and republican politics. All this was achieved with the national executive being defeated on several occasions, indicating a healthy, thinking party membership. This is reflected more widely in the SSP's internal structures and culture of democratic accountability. It has not just the organized political platforms but also self-organized networks of women, black and Asian, lesbian and gay and disabled members. Similarly, it has a number of working parties on various specific issues and an education network that encourages branches to move towards more inclusive and participatory ways of running their meetings and committees.

With its politics and democratic structures remaining healthy, the SSP's prospects revolve around whether it can re-energise and re-motivate its wider membership to tap into the considerable possibilities that still exist for it. Next year, the Liberal Democrats will find it less easy to pose as the party of opposition given that they are part of the ruling coalition; and since late 2005, the SSP has had a better run in the media by virtue of grassroots campaigning for its parliamentary bills to abolish prescription

charges and the council tax. In the unions, it has agitated around the attack on public sector pensions. Through these campaigns, it has begun recruiting substantially again and has established, and further built upon, relationships with an array of progressive pressure groups and campaigning organizations.

At its annual conference, the SSP also launched its 'People not Profit' initiative for the 2007 elections. 'People not Profit' seeks to relate the SSP's work over everyday concerns on the NHS, free school meals, education, the environment, imperialism and the council tax to socialist ideals. It provides a unifying

theme to all the SSP's various activities. In the year left, if SSP members can get out into the communities, schools, colleges, workplaces and streets in sufficient numbers and do this work successfully, it will boost not only its own fortunes but also those of the left south of the border. **R**

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Australia's Socialist Alliance in Difficulty

Peter Graham

Much on the model of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), Australia's Socialist Alliance (SA) was formed by a number of socialist organizations and individuals in 2001. Two years later the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), the largest piece of the alliance, folded its operations into the new formation. Though the DSP continued to exist as an SA tendency, their paper, *The Green Left Weekly*, which is the largest socialist newspaper in Australia, became Socialist Alliance's publication.

The DSP – the last letter now stands for Perspective – emerged from its Congress last January, saying it had misread the political conditions two years ago and now needs to take a step back from the SA to rebuild their own political tendency. Arguing that, "the DSP has not been able, and cannot afford, to operate as a purely internal tendency in the Socialist Alliance," the Congress would seem to throw another wrench into Australia's experiment in the regroupment of the left and the building of a new socialist organization.

In acknowledging that the SA has fallen short of its hopes, some of the socialist affiliates are painted as obstructionists by the DSP, while other organizations and individuals are viewed as all too passive members of the alliance. The DSP conceives the Alliance itself as being – catch your breath – a broad anti-capitalist party, with a perspective of building itself into a multi-tendency socialist party, which would be a stepping stone to a "mass revolutionary socialist party."

The Internationalist Socialist Organi-

zation (ISO), which is affiliated with the British Socialist Workers Party's international organization and which is the second largest socialist group in the Alliance, had earlier decided to decrease their commitment to SA. They starkly write that the SA has "degenerated, with few branches active, membership declining and run-down morale." The ISO and a number of smaller affiliates, some of whom have terminated their activities in the alliance, note that it's been tough slogging at this historical juncture and fault the DSP for throwing its weight around.

There's no doubt that since the formation of the alliance, the anti-globalization movement has declined and, while impressive numbers have come out to anti-war demonstrations, there's little movement evident between such focal points. A fault line running through the Alliance since its birth was the disproportionate weight the DSP tended to have because of its size and organization. Clearly, the DSP has failed in balancing the right of its members to actively shape the alliance while ensuring that the SA is a broad, representative organization.

But the ISO argues that a flawed idea of party organization is at the root of the SA's troubles. Along with the Socialist Democracy Tendency – which unlike the ISO, sees a greater goodwill, collaboration and respect amongst socialists as a virtue of the SA experience – the ISO sees the DSP as grafting the organizational methods of the organized socialist left onto the Alliance. The ISO believes the DSP is experiencing trouble precisely because of this method. Instead of 'fudging' the dis-

tinction between what is a revolutionary and what is a reformist party, the ISO says that a united front between reformists and revolutionaries, primarily involving electoral work, is what's needed.

Of the two models, the Scottish one seems to be the most attractive, being an actual attempt to regroup socialists, both independent and organized into an open and democratic party which also campaigns on issues between elections. The RESPECT model is an electoral-front kind of organization in which the ISO's UK sister organization, the SWP, plays a dominant role (in some way similar to that of Australia's DSP) and allows it organization to maintain things on the left as they are and provides a safety net for political groupings wishing to cling to their own apparatus. While the ISO derides the SA for having its own papers and a unitary membership structure, component parts in a RESPECT model get to maintain these features. (These features also existed in SA, but were seen as transitory). There's no question where RESPECT supporters see their primary loyalty and activity under this model – to their own respective organizations. Instead of encouraging socialists to participate in meaningful joint work and discussion and in the building of a working class alternative to Tony Blair's New Labour, the politics of RESPECT would seem to ensure the old forms of socialist organization are perpetuated. **R**

Set your web browser to www.socialist-alliance.org/resources/idb/Vol6No1.pdf to see the debate in the SA's Bulletin.

Media Democracy in Canada

David Skinner

WHAT IS MEDIA DEMOCRACY?

Over the last several decades corporate media have played a key role in the restructuring of capital, providing both ideological support for neo-liberal processes of deregulation and important elements in the information and communication dimensions of the emerging global economy. In this context, private corporate media have undergone centralization and concentration of ownership, while public broadcasting and alternative and community media have suffered cutbacks in funding and other forms of government support. As media have been gripped by this economic rationalization, people who have found their interests increasingly frozen out of their operations and fields of representation have been calling for reform and a restructuring of communicative resources. Concerns have been raised by a wide range of citizens' groups — such as journalists and other media workers, 'friends' of public broadcasting, library associations, unions and left of centre political parties, students, and social justice groups and activists — who all decry a narrowing of voices and shrinking diversity in media.

Taken together, these struggles can be seen as an attempt to institute media democracy. As Robert Hackett, one of Canada's foremost researchers on the subject, observes, "media democratization comprises efforts to change media messages, practices, institutions and contexts (including state communication policies), in a direction which enhances democratic values and subjectivity, as well as equal participation in societal decision making." For instance, in Canada, Media Democracy Day (see inset) activists argue that "the media must provide us with the full range of information we need to be active and responsible citizens, and that means that each of us needs the maximum possible access to the power of the media." In media democracy initiatives, media access is generally defined quite broadly and often is seen as having three dimensions: i) reform of the corporate media — that is, the introduction of measures to make the media more diverse and responsible to the population at large; ii) developing alternatives to the corporate media — that is, providing adequate funding for public broadcasters and finding ways to promote the development of independent and community media; iii) media education — whereby the purpose of education is to provide people with the tools to become more critical media consumers and to get them more involved in the media, as either critics or contributors.

Currently there is no organized or consolidated media democracy movement in Canada. However, beginning with struggles to establish public broadcasting and the CBC in the early 1930's, protests over the ownership and lack of diversity of media outlets have a long history in this country and, over the last forty years, a number of federal government committees

were struck to study these problems. For instance, in the wake of escalating concentration of ownership, the 1970 Report of the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media (Davey Committee) made a wide range of recommendations to curb further concentration and its effects. In 1978, the Report of the Royal Commission on Corporate Concentration recommended that the CRTC be empowered to prevent the cross ownership of broadcasting outlets and newspapers in the same market. And in 1981, following a sweeping review of the newspaper industry, the Royal Commission on Newspapers (Kent Commission) found that, "The structure of the industry that has now been created, that existing law and public policy have permitted, is clearly and directly contrary to the public interest." Based on these findings, Kent issued a comprehensive series of recommendations for reform. However, few of the recommendations of any of these committees were ever acted upon.

More recently, following a 1996 decision by the CRTC to change regulations that had been designed to keep newspaper, broadcasting and telecommunications companies separate, cross-media ownership deals struck during the year 2000 radically altered the Canadian mediascape. Three companies emerged out of this orgy of media mergers with commanding control of Canadian news markets: CanWest Global, Bell Globemedia, and Quebecor. (See Figure 1). Following these mergers, corporate tinkering with editorial policy and firings — particularly surrounding CanWest's takeover of the Southam newspaper chain — prompted public calls for a federal inquiry into the effects of recent consolidation.

Meanwhile, as the economic rationalization of private, profit-driven corporate media has proceeded apace, over the last 15

Media Democracy Day

Modeled after Earth Day and celebrated each October, **Media Democracy Day** was launched in 2001 by activists in Vancouver and Toronto. The international day of action centers on three pillars of the media democracy movement: education, protest and reform. Events are organized to increase public awareness of media issues, publicize alternatives to mainstream media, and challenge the existing media system.

-Vancouver Media Democracy Day Committee 2003

Since 2001, Media Democracy Day has been celebrated in cities and towns across Canada and the United States as well as in Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Indonesia, Spain and the U.K..

years, the public and community media have also met with significant deregulatory pressures, resulting in cutbacks to the CBC, moves to privatize provincial broadcasters, and changes in cable regulation that cut off mandatory funding of community television. These changes too have prompted concern from a wide range of community interests.

While the federal government took no direct action to address these concerns, they did find voice in the 2003 Report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage (Lincoln Report) and prompted the Senate Committee on Transportation and Communications to strike an inquiry to examine the diversity and quality of news and information available to Canadians. Lincoln made a number of recommendations designed to help ensure editorial independence, control cross media ownership, bolster public broadcasting, and support community broadcasting. They have yet to be acted upon. The Senate Committee's hearings are ongoing.

PROBLEMS FACING MEDIA DEMOCRACY

While there are a number of voices calling for change in the structure and operation of media in Canada, public pressure is fragmented at best and the policy process presents clear challenges to effecting change. The only independent organization in Canada that is actively engaged on issues of media regulation on a full time basis is the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting and, while this organization sometimes comments on issues surrounding the press, their primary focus is broadcasting. And although there are a number of groups and organizations promoting reform of print, broadcast, and web-based media in Canada, apart from unions representing journalists, they are very part time, generally voluntary efforts.

Moreover, the groups and individuals advocating reform are divided on the goals of the project. While some unions and advocacy groups call for decisive government action many journalists, editors, and journalism educators are against comprehensive regulation, citing concerns over possible government censorship. As the president of the Canadian Association of Journalists has put it, "We are not calling for government control over the editorial process. We agree that politicians have no role in deciding what journalists should publish." Consequently, there are questions about exactly what kinds of reforms key players in this struggle would support. Interventions to the Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) regarding license renewals for CTV and Global after the mergers in 2000 underscore these observations. Despite the con-

cerns raised by past public inquiries, there was a large degree of support for the mergers, particularly among industry organizations and journalism professors. Moreover, a large number of media activists – particularly those associated with social justice movements — are not involved in these reform efforts. Some are focused on building community media and its associated policy processes. Others, either informed by an anarchist sensibility or simply feeling alienated and disenfranchised, are suspicious of government and the vertical or one-way flow of communication that characterizes traditional media. Consequently, they are focused on creating their own "autonomous" media, such as Independent Media Centres.

The problems presented by this fragmented support for reform become clearer when one considers the fate of recommendations made by the Davey Committee, the Kent Commission, and the Lincoln Report. While all these inquiries provided a range of proposals to curb concentration of ownership and improve media content, given the reluctance of successive governments to push forward with reform perhaps the only way to get it on legislative and regulatory agendas is through broad and sustained public pressure. But in current circumstances such pressure does not appear to be forthcoming.

Apart from the reform of corporate media, another way of addressing concerns over media diversity is to increase the number of alternative media voices or outlets. "Alternative media" should both encompass and encourage social and political diversity. The key here is that these organizations have a mandate or purpose to serve a particular range of social groups and/or interests and that the mandate is foregrounded over the private profit motive. Ideally, the outlet is operated on a not-for profit or co-operative basis. Among the kinds of organizations that might be included under this definition are the ethnic and labour press, environmental publications, aboriginal media, and other media with a progressive social mandate. There are many print, broadcast, and web-based →

Market Share and Cross-Ownership in Nine Local Markets, 2002

Market	Ownership Group	Market share (%)	
		Newscasts	Dailies
Quebec	Quebecor	47.1	56.2
Toronto	Bell Globemedia	43.8	18.3
Toronto	CanWest Global	33.0	11.5
Anglophone Montreal	CanWest Global	5.0	100.0
Francophone Montreal	Quebecor	37.1	60.4
Regina	CanWest Global	28.3	100.0
Saskatoon	CanWest Global	15.3	100.0
Calgary	CanWest Global	32.2	57.8
Edmonton	CanWest Global	39.7	60.0
Vancouver	CanWest Global	70.6	100.0

Source: Centre d'études sur les médias, "Media Ownership in Canada," Report prepared for the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 5 February 2003. (Taken from: Standing Senate Committee on Transportation and Communication. *Interim Report on the Canadian News Media*. Ottawa: Senate of Canada, 2004. p. 37.)

media organizations operating across Canada that meet with this definition. However, for the most part, because of their small size and reach, these media outlets lack economic stability. Small budgets allow for few, if any, paid workers and the size and demographics of their audiences are often unknown, making advertising and subscription sales difficult. Economic uncertainty also creates irregular publication dates and poor distribution. Moreover, there is little in the way of government support to help promote the development of these media and some of the infrastructure that did exist has been eroded over the last decade. In the larger struggle for media reform, the interests of alternative media are often sidelined or completely overshadowed by those working with issues surrounding corporate media and the CBC. Giving the concerns of the people working with these media a central place in media reform initiatives might prove a key step in helping consolidate a media democracy movement in Canada.

WHITHER MEDIA DEMOCRACY IN CANADA?

While efforts to promote media democracy in Canada are scattered and divided, pressures to continue the economic rationalization of media are building. There are signs that the federal government is poised to ease restrictions on foreign ownership in telecommunications and, given the increasing ownership and

operational ties between telecommunications, broadcasting and newspapers, it only seems a matter of time before restrictions in these areas too will fall. While opening the floodgate to foreign investment in Canada's media seems a sure way to raise share prices, history illustrates that it will not increase the range and diversity in media. In media properties, profits are wrung from extending economies of scale and "repurposing" content created for one medium for use in another. Even a cursory review of magazine stands and television schedules illustrates that Canadian media markets are already largely extensions of their American counterparts. Further integrating these markets will not create more diversity, particularly in terms of Canadian perspectives on the world.

Given present circumstances, it is doubtful that enough pressure will be brought to bear on the federal government to stop, or even slow, the tide of deregulation engulfing Canadian media. Although resources are scarce, perhaps it is time for some of the more well-heeled advocates of media reform to take a stronger role in organizing a broad based Media Democracy movement in Canada. **R**

David Skinner is a political-economist of communication and media at York University Canada and is also active in Canadian and international media democracy struggles.

Proposals for Media Reform

Proposals for media reform generally fall in three areas: i) limit and reverse current levels of concentration of ownership in Canadian media; ii) promote diversity in corporate media ownership, as well as in the range and types of media available; iii) encourage media to meet with their social and public responsibilities. Among the measures commonly called for in Canada are:

- i) *Impose limits on ownership, particularly cross-media ownership.* Following recommendations made by a long list of public enquiries, there are calls for limits on cross-media ownership and limits on the number of media outlets one company might own in any one market. These often include calls for current owners to divest holdings to meet proposed limits.
- ii) *Ensure that the CBC/SRC and provincial public service broadcasters are guaranteed stable and adequate funding.*
- iii) *Amend the Federal Competition Act.* At present, the regulatory body that oversees the Competition Act – the Competition Bureau – only considers the impacts of media mergers on advertising markets. Reforms in this area would have the Bureau consider the impact of the consolidation on the diversity of free expression of news and ideas, as well as on advertising competition.
- iv) *Legislate a code of professional practice or code of ethics for journalists.* Giving such a code the force of law would help protect journalists and other media workers from undue influence and possible obstructions by owners.
- v) *Restructure provincial Press Councils and/or institute a National Media Commission.* In an effort to stave off more coercive forms of regulation, industry sponsored Press Councils were established in some provinces in the wake of both the Davey and Kent Commissions. However, self regulation is often seen as ineffective in terms of trying to promote fairness and balance in media coverage and there is no regulatory body at the national level.
- vi) *Right of reply legislation.* Following the lead of the British Campaign for Press and Broadcast Freedom, there has also been a call for a for some form of right of reply legislation so as to provide some form of editorial redress to persons who are misrepresented in the media.
- vii) *Establish tax incentives, production funds and other measures to encourage investment in community and alternative media.* There are myriad programs and incentives to encourage the prosperity of for-profit corporate media, but few supports for other types of media. Change here is long overdue.
- viii) *Encourage government – one of the largest advertisers in the country – to use independent and community media for their information campaigns.*

Fruit of the Poet-tree: Ken Saro-Wiwa (Ogoni 9)

Charles Fraser

Shell Oil's tv commercials
Show how environmentally friendly they are
Comical little fish zooming here and there
All ending on a positive note
Shell Oil is good for the atmosphere
We invest in people and our planet
We're a corporation you can trust
This is all common knowledge
But the devil is in the crude
All brought to you for a price
Halfway across the world
Sucking oil out of ancient grounds
With no concern for Indigenous people,
Their lands, culture, or future
Deals made with corrupt politicians
Wearing American combat fatigues
With gold braids and fake medals
Freedom fighters deemed bad for business
The oil corporations a part of global royalty
Corruption, production, seduction,
No one intervenes the world remains silent
Conspirators by their decisions to do nothing
Stock and bond markets soar...

One ruthless freedom fighter
Uses the sharp edge of poetry
To defend his Ogoni people against imperial forces
Of foreign oil barons. Ken Saro-Wiwa:
Humanitarian, freedom fighter, poet, is falsely accused
Against an outcry felt around the world
Even to a G-8 conference in New Zealand, no one intervenes
Saro-wiwa and 9 Ogoni warriors
Were hung, taken away in a garbage truck
Buried in an unmarked grave
His poetry lives on
Inspiring allies the world over
The corrupt politicians and CEO's
Are gone, even in marked graves
No one will call their names
But Shell Oil is a corporation you can trust

Post Modern Battlegrounds

Charles Fraser

Wherefore art thou champions
Of justice,
Those "organic intellectuals"
Willing to give their all
For the greater cause of good
Those knights of transformative praxis
Unwilling to sit any longer
At round tables of post-modernism debates
The time for action is upon us
Our war is just
Championing the rights of global citizens
Over trans-national corporations

The new global royalty
Is once again colonizing Earth
With their greedy sights on outer space
New frontiers to exploit
At the expense of inner heart space
Gramsci's warnings still heard
From his Italian prison cell/tomb:
Hegemony supports the corruption
Of the elite on every level.
The 'black abyss' & "the oppressor's heel"
Is in clear sight
The troops have grown soft
Living off the fat of the land
Put there by the struggles of their fathers/mothers
Rise-up again, take to the streets and organize
Challenge mainstream media madness
Treat each other with respect
There are many struggles but one oppressor!
Allies are needed to link our armor
Egalitarianism vs. totalitarianism
A planet awaits the outcome.

Charles Fraser is a poetic anti-capitalist activist
based in British Columbia.

Organizations & Websites Working for Media Democracy & Media Reform

Campaign for Press & Broadcast Freedom
www.presscampaign.org

Canadian Association of Journalists
www.caj.ca

Canadian Journalists for Free Expression
www.cjfe.org

Communications, Energy & Paperworkers Union
www.cep.ca

Friends of Canadian Broadcasting
www.friends.ca

Media Democracy Day
www.mediademocracyday.org

Our Public Airwaves
www.publicairwaves.ca

Quebec Federation of Journalists
www.fpqj.org

Your Media
www.yourmedia.ca

Adbusters

www.adbusters.com

Community Media Education Society
<http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cmes/>

Media Awareness Network
www.media-awareness.ca

“Media Democracy”

Beyond the U.S. Global Media Village

Tanner Mirrlees

Proponents of the idea of a global media village often contend that the world has become increasingly interconnected by time-and-space compressive technologies, that globalizing media corporations are moving effortlessly between borders, that the tele-communicational and cultural sovereignty of national-states has been undermined by commercial media flows, and that the capacity of some states to organize public consent to a cultural-nationalist project has been thwarted by a cosmopolitan-minded consumerist media.

Perhaps, but none of these transformations were necessary or inevitable. Today, the basis of today's global media village continues to be imperialism, the U.S. state continues to be this village's political overseer and neoliberal policy-pusher, and U.S. media corporations continue to economically dominate. While the content of global entertainment may increasingly exhibit local cultural flare (“MTV Asia” or “Thailand Idol” are exemplary of this “glocalized” marketing strategy, which imparts consumerist values through the spectacle of cultural difference) the global media village reflects the persistence of U.S. cultural imperialism. Today's imperialist communication and cultural system is not unchangeable and it has a political and economic history that is as much the outcome of material transformation as it is the universalization of a particular U.S. ideology of “media democracy.”

Historically, the U.S. state and U.S. media capitalists have attempted to control the meaning of “media democracy” in order to make the global media village in their domestic image. For the U.S. ruling classes, “media democracy” has always denoted a media system owned by capitalists, whose entertainment-producing firms ostensibly reflected consumer demand. Thus, U.S. media democracy is understood as a function of the invisible hand of the free media market, which promises diversity of programming because of its ostensible ability to reflect a diversity of niche consumer tastes and lifestyles.

This notion of “media democracy” is false, as the U.S. state has never been entirely separate from or disinterested in the capitalist media; undemocratic, as it supports the monopolization of the means to produce and circulate information by a minority of capitalists; and, ideological, as it mystifies class inequalities and struggles over of the global mode of media production. Nevertheless, this U.S. brand of “media democracy” represents the individual interests of a particular state and class, and is increas-

ingly passing as the “global interest.”

As the U.S. media globalized in the WWII period, this U.S. ideology of “media democracy” was transformed into a rarely acknowledged but always-present U.S. foreign media policy: the *free flow of information doctrine*. With this doctrine, and through a number of international policy and trade forums, the U.S. state and U.S. media capital aggressively attempted to universalize and win others to their particular ideology of “media democracy.”

Before the end of World War II, U.S. media corporations expressed a desire to make the world safe for the unhindered cross-border flow of their information. “In June 1944,” recalled the late Herbert Schiller, “the directors of the American Society of Newspaper Editors adopted resolutions urging both major political parties to support world freedom of information and unrestricted communications for their news throughout the world.” The Democrats and the Republicans incorporated these demands into a consensual party-platform campaign. The Democrats stated: “We believe that without loss of sovereignty, world development and lasting peace are within humanity's grasp. They will come with the greater enjoyment of those freedoms by the peoples of the world and with the freer flow among them of ideas and goods.” The Republicans stated: “all channels of news must be kept open with equality of access to information at the source. If agreement can be achieved with foreign nations to establish the same principles, it will be a valuable contribution to future peace.”

By September 1944, Congress adopted a resolution that reiterated the free-flow demands of U.S. media capital stating “its belief in the worldwide right of interchange of news by news-gathering and distributing agencies, whether individual or associate, by any means, without discrimination as to sources, distribution rates, or charges; and that this right should be protected by international compact.” Having secured the American state's support for their imperialist goal, the directors of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, declared: “most Americans and their newspapers will support Government policies and actions toward removal of all political, legal, and economic barriers to the media of information and... our Government should make this abundantly clear to other nations.” By 1946, the State Department seemed to heed the private sector's call. Comments by William Benton, the Assistant Secretary of State, in the 1946 Department of State Bulletin, reflected the state's economic rationale for promoting the free flow of information around the world:

The State Department plans to do everything within its power along political or diplomatic lines to help break down the artificial barriers to the expansion of

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red pepper
raising the political temperature



private American news agencies, magazines, motion pictures, and other media of communications throughout the world.... Freedom of the press – and freedom of exchange of information generally – is an integral part of our foreign policy.

The influential Hutchins Commission's report, *Peoples Speaking to Peoples*, soon "recommended that the Congress, the Department of State and the United Nations work to secure the progressive removal of political barriers and the lessening of economic restrictions which impeded the free flow of information across national borders." According to this Time Inc.-funded document, enduring global peace, democracy, and understanding would result from the universalization of the U.S. free flow doctrine.

The free flow of information doctrine's rhetorical claims to foster universal peace, democracy, and cultural understanding, however, have always belied the *realpolitik* of the U.S. state, which has above all, supported its media bourgeoisie. Through the free flow of information doctrine, the U.S. state articulated, according to Bob McChesney and Ed Herman, activists in the US media democracy movement, "an aggressive trade position on behalf of US media interests. The core operational idea behind the principle was that trans-national media firms and advertisers should be permitted to operate globally, with minimal government intervention." Indeed, Ed Comor, a prominent Canadian communications analyst, suggests that the "free-flow of information is a common worldview" that the U.S. has articulated to represent

"the perceived interests of a trans-national, corporate business system and its ancillary functions."

The U.S. state has never, without strategic considerations, abided by the idealistic principles espoused by its free-flow of information doctrine, which it has attempted to impose upon others. As U.S.-based media capitalists sought access to new territories to dump their informational commodities, the U.S. state was on the front line of a political battle to open markets. The US has gained a clearly dominant media position, yet US governments and business still attempt to thwart other countries' efforts of national media self-determination via barriers public policies or their own barriers to imports.

While breaking down impediments to the free flow of its commodity culture, the U.S. state simultaneously ensured that U.S. media corporations dominated. Domestic trade protectionism and a host of subsidies boosted local cultural industries in times of economic crisis. Presently, Washington provides an important political leverage for the American media, providing a remarkable consensus of policy and material interest between media and political elites in imperialist expansionism.

The U.S. state and U.S. capital have consistently sought to destroy all national barriers, sovereign regulatory obstacles, and cultural policy initiatives that limited their internationalization while symbiotically working to ensure that U.S. media and cultural imperialism went unchallenged. "The contradiction between advocating open access and yet supporting American monopolies is a contradiction that was never resolved." The global media village we inhabit should be largely understood as the outcome of a struggle by the U.S. state and U.S. media corporations to internationalize and universalize their capitalist social relations and neoliberal policies. Thus, the global media village did not emerge all by itself, nor does it necessarily have to persist as it is.

The idea of the global media village is really charming. But too often, the utopian claims of global media village proponents inadvertently reflect a post-sovereign, post-national, and post-public global communication system that bears the characteristics of the U.S. broadcasting model, is organized according to U.S. neoliberal communications policies, and is saturated by U.S. cultural industry products. There is very little cultural diversity, two-way cultural flow, or reciprocity of cultural exchange within this so-called global media village.

Yet, international struggles against U.S. cultural imperialism and for an alternative global media village are on the rise. On 20 October 2005, the UNESCO General Conference adopted the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which seeks to exempt "culture" from the U.S., WTO and IMF trade policies that regard it as a commodity. With the exception of the U.S. and Israel, 148 states approved the policy. A site for socialist struggle is opening up, but many questions need to be asked: how can international and nationally-based groups articulate an anti-market path to cultural freedom, democracy, and understanding that goes beyond simple cultural protectionism and inter-state competition? What is the best way of challenging the "media democracy" and "free-flow of information" of the U.S.'s global media village? Can we imagine a socialist global media village, let alone mobilize to produce it? **R**

Democracy and the Problem of the Media:

An Interview with Robert McChesney

Greg Albo (GA), Sam Gindin (SG), and Tanner Mirrlees (TM) recently caught up with Robert McChesney (RM) in Toronto while he was discussing his new book, *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century* (Monthly Review Press, 2004) to talk about emerging media democracy struggles in North America. McChesney has become the leading critic of the North America media and a central activist in the media democracy movement that has been gaining significant organizational momentum and moral force.

Mirrlees: When did the media reform movement gain widespread popular support?

McChesney: The movement for media reform exploded in 2003, in response to the news coverage of the Iraq war. US media coverage of the war was terrible, propagandistic even; it did not question, let alone, challenge any of the claims made by the Bush Administration. At this time the Federal Communications Commission announced that it would be reviewing the media ownership rules so that the big media corporations could get monopoly rights over cable, dvd, and radio licenses. The firms that were leading the lobby fight to acquire these licenses were Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation and Clear Channel Radio, the very same corporations that were leading the propaganda campaign that sold the Iraq war to the American public. So, when Moveon.org and the anti-war movement discovered that the same corporations that were responsible for war propaganda were gaining new monopoly licenses, democratic media activism and anti-war protest converged immediately after the invasion. We generated 100,000s of supporters that began to recognize the failure of the US's monopolized press.

Gindin: Canada has similar problems.

McChesney: Canada needs a media democracy movement like the US. In some ways, Canada is far more advanced than the US. Canada has a far richer tradition of critical media policy debates than the US. There is a richer history; the founding of the CBC is a perfect example; it was a process led by a grassroots movement that rejected a purely commercial, for-profit broadcasting system. And Canada has a very strong tradition of progressive academics. And you have a pretty strong union, by American standards anyway. You have the necessary ingredients to build something very positive, something very progressive. I believe that Canadian citizens are just as interested in these issues as American citizens.

Mirrlees: Many Canadians are worried that the CBC (the publicly subsidized and mandated Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) will be de-regulated and opened to the privatizing forces of the so-called "free-market."

McChesney: In our struggles, we have tried not to use the words

'de-regulate' and 'free-market.' De-regulate is a misnomer – it means re-regulation in the interests of the media corporations. Regulation will always exist, what changes are the political-economic interests that get represented. But everybody seems to like the idea of de-regulation: 'hey, we are all free now, no one is regulating us, no one can tell us what to do!' We can't allow this term to be used so frivolously.

Albo: What are the core political objectives of the struggle for media reform? What kind of policies do you feel would de-stabilize or challenge the current monopolization of the mass-media?

McChesney: Our political agenda, from the liberal perspective, is to democratize the policy debates, to make them open to public participation. The objectives of reform, of the 'democratization of the media,' is not only to create a commercial, de-centralized, and locally controlled media sector, but also, to develop an equal or dominant non-profit, non-commercial, non-centrally controlled and heterogeneous media sector. We hope to create state subsidies for this non-commercial media sector, so that smaller firms can exist and be empowered. The debate about how these subsidies will come into effect is still open. There are a number of ways we could subsidize this sector – the current media system is subsidized, so it is really just a matter of shifting subsidies around. We want to set up a tax-credit where citizens can divert a certain amount of money from their taxes toward non-profit media of their choice. This would enable not just rich people and foundations to subsidize the media, but working class people as well. The ultimate success of this initiative and the media reform movement in general, will require alliances with broader progressive forces.

Mirrlees: If the central aim of media reform in the US is to divide the media system between a non-profit public sector and a for-profit private sector, then how does this contribute to a more 'democratized' environment? Could you discuss in more detail what you mean by 'democratize'?

McChesney: We have these two sectors in existence already, but the non-profit sector is emaciated. So, I am not quite sure...

Mirrlees: Okay, the representatives of the for-profit media sector claim to be 'democratic,' to represent public interests, to re-

flect and distribute, in the form of media commodities, public tastes and wants, etc. So, how would this enlarged non-commercial public media sector represent the public interest? Would it be a matter of representatives of this public sector deciding upon what the public interest is, or would it entail a more dialogical process?

McChesney: The basic argument we have to debunk here is that ‘the market gives the people what they want’ and that the introduction of a non-commercial and public media system will introduce some bureaucratic imperatives that will interfere with the public’s ability to express their choice in the market. Challenging this argument is a central fight. I think that we can debunk the notion that the market is the sufficient arbiter of public choice. As for the question about how a public sector could better represent the public interest—we don’t know for sure. But it could represent other non-commercial aims, ideas, and ambitions; it could provide citizens with an alternative.

McChesney: So, the establishment of a non-commercial sector would democratize the media by diversifying the sources and quality of information, thereby providing audiences with even more choices?



Mirrlees: Yes, but a non-commercial media should not be dependent solely on consumer demand. What we want to do is to change the nature of production and the imperatives involved in the media production process.

McChesney: As much as I identify with your proposal for a government subsidized non-commercial media sector and a de-

centralized commercial one, there are still limitations. In Canada for example, the CBC is publicly subsidized but it is also dependent on advertising revenue (due to massive budget cuts). So, despite the subsidies, the CBC still must compete with global news corporations like CNN for both audiences and advertisers.

Mirrlees: We want to remove advertising from public broadcasters and provide them with sufficient funding. The difficulty, however, is that the information provided by public broadcasters can be just as bad as information provided by private ones. We support public broadcasting, and we don’t want to eliminate it. But in the lead up to the war in Iraq, the public broadcasters simply reproduced the political line of the private broadcasters. And there are more problems: hierarchy and commercial values. So it is tricky political fight.

Gindin: And the justification for public broadcasting is often nationalism, or serving “the national interest.”

McChesney: What we should develop is not one singular, massive non-commercial media sector, but supplement the public broadcasting model, like Canada’s CBC for example, with a diverse range of non-commercial and community-based media institutions.

Albo: But how could we develop such institutions in the print-media sector, with news papers?

McChesney: That is a good question. We have to put our heads together. Some states in Europe provide partisan subsidies to keep competitive daily newspapers running. But they are all under attack by the corporate sector. Producing independent newspaper in communities is a great idea, but very challenging, because of the high-cost of printing. So, if the goal is to develop local community media forms, I would suggest that we try to move away from expensive newspaper production and toward lower-cost community radio services and websites. But the real challenge is building our capacities and gaining financial resources that would enable us to develop these media forms. If we are dependent on the market, we are forced to play by market rules.

Gindin: Yes, but because of new technologies, many independent grassroots newspapers are being developed.

McChesney: Are they weeklies funded by advertising?

Gindin: Yes.

McChesney: Some of these weeklies can provide a space for some critical work, but in the US experience, commercial pressures dominate.

Albo: What we need to do is to fully employ critical journalists.

McChesney: If we want to raise funds for critical journalism, we could tax the giant news corporations; we could then re-distribute the wealth to a fund for a journalist co-operative, which would produce a competitive for-profit paper, which then created more jobs for journalists. A second not-for-profit paper, largely funded by the revenues generated by the paper produced by the journalist co-op, then provides a critical news source to the public.

Mirrlees: You’ve mentioned how tendencies on the political left and political right agreed on the need for media reform in the US. What are the political stakes of this consensus? Is the struggle for media reform being articulated to struggles against capitalism, or is it something different?

McChesney: We don’t know yet. The American left is so underdeveloped, we are not at a point to effectively address your questions. I wish we had to worry about these kinds of questions. Ultimately, to achieve our objectives, and the structural changes that they will entail, we need a significant burst of activity on the political left. →

But the term “Right-wing” is a little bit reductive. The right is much more fluid and heterogeneous than it is made out to be. We should not write off people that identify themselves as right-wing. Because the political left is so weak in the USA, when Americans become critical of the status-quo in the U.S., they often take the right to be the only form of opposition because there is not a big “Left” to move to. Many people that identify

themselves as right-wing have very progressive ideas about social justice, community and equality. They are not all individualistic free-market lunatics. We have to be open-minded and move beyond the reductive labels and struggle to form a common ground. Eventually, we will have to consider the questions you posed, but we are not there yet. I look forward to being there; it will be a great day. **R**

The State of Empire

&

Imperialism Without States

Review by Simon J. Black

Incoherent Empire
By Michael Mann
Verso, 278 pp.

The New Imperialism
by David Harvey
Oxford University Press, 275 pp.

“...as for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters. The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged...all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. But I could get nothing into perspective. I was young and ill-educated...I did not even know...that the Empire was dying...”

The scribbles of an American soldier gone AWOL in Iraq? Maybe a passage from the future memoir of Lyndie England? Unlike England, George Orwell never set foot in Abu-Graib prison, but for those ordered to carry out its deeds the experience of empire seems to transcend time and place. The empire was British; the colony was Burma; the rule was despotic. After serving with the colonial police, Orwell committed his life to the causes of anti-imperialism and democratic socialism. The author’s famed essay,

“Shooting an Elephant,” was penned in 1936; the British Empire was in decline. In a mere three years it would be engaged in a war of savage brutality. By World War II, *Pax Britannica* had been eclipsed, but the outcome of that war set the stage for the emergence of a new empire and a new imperialism. With the reconstruction of Japan and Germany under the Marshall Plan, the United States embarked on an imperial quest to spread the ‘free market’.

Yet from 1945 to 1989, empire and imperialism were words relegated to history textbooks, as concepts that did not fit the global political reality of two superpowers locked in Cold War conflict. When in polite company, if one wanted to reveal oneself as a Marxist (without singing the Internationale) one could utter the word ‘imperialism’. ‘Empire’ was the less offensive term: it was a place not a process. For the British elite, ‘empire’ conjured up images of smartly dressed army officers sipping gin and tonics under the hot Indian sun after a long day of doing benevolent things for grateful people. But *imperialism*, now that was the language of the left.

‘Empire’ is once again on the lips of its supporters and remains a sour taste in the mouth of its opponents. Vaulted from academic obscurity to the front page of London and New York’s book reviews, historian Niall Ferguson has made an in-

dustry out of empire, as the Empire makes industry out of the world. Afflicted with a Churchillian fetish, Ferguson sees the glory and good of a strong power spreading liberal democratic values across the globe. He likens America’s offerings to the best of the British Empire. Other intellectuals who have been seized by this imperial moment – Benjamin Barber and Michael Ignatieff among them – are more cautious supporters of the American *modus operandi*.

Yet empire’s apologists have been engaged on the literary terrain by a number of critical accounts of US dominance. Among these are Michael Mann’s *Incoherent Empire* and David Harvey’s *The New Imperialism*. Both Harvey and Mann provide trenchant critiques of the U.S. Empire and are a welcome turn from much of the left’s preoccupation with either global cosmopolitanism or empires of the ether, not based in any state formation. However, despite the commonalities of their subject, the two authors are engaged in fundamentally different projects.

Mann, a professor at UCLA and disciple of sociologist Max Weber, has written on the topic of power for much of his academic life. Neoclassical economists have never developed a theory of imperialism and apparently neither have Weberians. What Mann provides is an account of the Empire, its architecture and

adventures. He claims that the new imperialism is little more than a new militarism. US Marines in Iraq are not merely foot soldiers of the free market; for Mann, Washington's neo-cons truly believe in their mission to spread democracy and freedom in the Middle East and are determined to carry it out whatever the disastrous consequences. In keeping with the theoretical framework that has served his scholarship so well, Mann puts forward an investigation of the Empire that analyzes its military, political, ideological and economic strengths and weaknesses. But he does so without a theory of imperialism in which to ground his analysis.

In contrast, David Harvey develops a theory of the new imperialism rooted in the work of Hannah Arendt, Marxist political economy, and his own contributions to what he calls "geographical-historical materialism" with its emphasis on the spatio-temporal aspect of capital's logic. Harvey traces the dialectical relationship between the capitalistic logic and territorial logic constitutive of imperialism. In this respect, of the two authors Harvey takes up the more arduous task. But what Harvey fails to do is put forward a comprehensive theory of the capitalist/imperialist state to work alongside his rigorous account of the new imperialism's economic drive. In this sense, while Mann gives us the state of Empire, Harvey provides an imperialism without a state. Thus, both books are ambitious but flawed attempts to come to grips with American imperial power.

Mann claims that the United States is a "military giant, back-seat economic driver, a political schizophrenic, and an ideological phantom." Apart from this abuse of metaphor, there are some serious flaws to Mann's characterization of the *Incoherent Empire*. Only a fool would contest Mann's claim that the United States is a military giant. Mann notes that by 2003 US military spending accounted for 40 percent of the entire world's budget. Yet the U.S. as "back-seat economic driver" requires a stronger argument than what Mann provides. Although he ac-

knowledges the continuing dominance of the Dollar and the role seignorage plays in the world economy, Mann's approach to the economic mechanisms of the Empire leaves much to be desired. Mann ignores the role of American capital in shaping the rules governing domestic economies around the world. Sometimes this activity is brash as in the current attempts of major U.S. temporary employment agencies to 'assist' European states in rewriting their regulations governing work standards. Other times, the imperial workings of U.S. capital can be more subtle. Although Mann recognizes how the U.S. has forced economic liberalization on countries, he takes the failures of liberalization (such as the East Asian economic crisis) to be by-products of a bad economic

overlooks the growing interdependence of the two markets. East Asian investors will not rush to cut off their nose to spite their face. Furthermore, Mann rightfully draws attention to the role of structural adjustment programs and trade agreements in advancing American interests in the economies of the Global South. Yet Mann sees these as a form of US "pressure", as "they do not actually drive their economies." I am sure the late Michael Manley of Jamaica among other leaders who've felt the grip of structural adjustment would beg to differ with Mann's assessment.

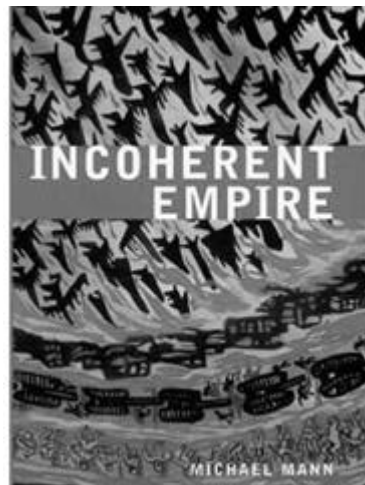
With an eye for detail, Mann dissects policy documents, news reports, and historical accounts to lay bare the inner workings of the Empire from the prisons of Guantanamo Bay to the roll of Hollywood

as an ideological force for American values abroad. Yet he often stops short of analyzing how the Empire's machinery has deep linkages in the U.S. political economy. For instance, Mann provides a laundry list of American firepower from smart bombs to dumb ones, chemical weapons to WMD. Yet the American arsenal's origins in the labs of General Electric or M.I.T. are left unexamined. This blind spot may be due to the structure of *Incoherent Empire*. Mann separates the early chapters of the book into

the military, ideological, political and economic; the result being the cross pollination of these spheres is often left unaddressed or undertheorized.

Mann's argument that the new American imperialism "is actually little more than a new militarism" reveals its ultimate weakness when the author tackles Lenin's great question of What Is To Be Done? Mann writes "Luckily, the United States is a democracy, with the political solution close at hand in November 2004. Throw the new militarists out of office." But the course of U.S. imperialism has changed little when Democrat's have occupied the White House. It is because he identifies imperialism too strongly with military adventurism that Mann comes to the conclusion he does.

Of the two authors, David Harvey has the deeper understanding of the →



model, not part and parcel of American economic hegemony. More nuanced approaches to U.S. imperialism have shown how financial crises often benefit American capital (witness the inflow of U.S. foreign direct investment into East Asian economies post-catastrophe) and the U.S. is a sly architect when it comes to crises containment, a point Harvey takes up in *The New Imperialism*. Such activity belies Mann's claim that the US "cannot directly control either foreign investors or foreign economies."

In addition, Mann states that East Asian capital's possible "loss of confidence in the health and stability of a permanent U.S. war economy" would be detrimental to American interests and beneficial to the EU. This supposed US vulnerability to East Asian capital flight (an element of the much repeated trade deficit argument)

economic roots of the Empire. For Harvey, capitalist imperialism arises out of the dialectical relation between territorial and capitalistic logics of power: "This dialectical relation," he writes, "sets the stage for an analysis of capitalist imperialism in terms of the intersection of these two distinctive but intertwined logics of power."

Harvey explicates the capitalistic logic of power in detail but its partner in this dance of imperialism is given less attention: Who is leading and to what tune are they dancing? At the beginning of chapter five, Harvey writes, "imperialism cannot be understood without first grappling with the theory of the capitalist state in all its diversity." Harvey fails to grapple with any significant theory of the capitalist state and does not put forward his own theory of the imperialist state with any coherence. The result being that the relationships Harvey sketches between the overaccumulation of capital, its need to be put to use, and the policies of the US state are very general and better explain broad shifts in the global political economy (the move from expanded reproduction to accumulation by dispossession post-1973) than specific policy initiatives (i.e. the invasion of Iraq).

Articulating a theory of the state would add coherence to Harvey's argument. How much influence does the capitalist class have on the U.S. state? Which faction of capital, if any, pushed for the

invasion of Iraq? Which departments of the state apparatus are under the sway of the dominant class? Harvey fails to address these questions in any serious depth. His repeated returns to Arendt's insight on imperialist logic – while illuminating and prescient – are not built upon in any substantial way.

Harvey hints at peaceful resolutions to the problem of overaccumulation. Surplus capital needs to find an internal home. Harvey believes a "new New Deal" would be a socially constructive outlet for capital (as opposed to Iraqi oil fields and privatized Bolivian water systems). Yet this requires state intervention of a type that the neo-cons find disturbing. For a committed Marxist, Harvey's solution to the new imperialism is peculiarly social democratic. Why doesn't Harvey discuss attempts to escape the capitalist logic altogether? If overaccumulation is a crisis inherent to capitalism, as Harvey believes it is, then his argument lends itself to a discussion of anti-capitalist alternatives much more than does Michael Mann's. Maybe Harvey thought that the Oxford crowd to which his lecture/book was first delivered would recoil in fright at the suggestion that we collectively transcend capitalism. Despite these flaws, Harvey's historical account of how American power grew and his concept of accumulation by dispossession (which he says is "at the heart of imperialist practice"), are all helpful contributions to the debate on the new

imperialism.

CONCLUSION

In 1898, Mark Twain, among other notable Americans, established the Anti-Imperialist League in response to the U.S. invasion and occupation of the Philippines. Twain and his compatriots stood for the anti-imperialist cause in the heart of the emerging Empire. The fate of U.S. imperialism will be greatly determined by ordinary Americans. Whether the current conjuncture will produce another anti-imperialist movement like the League remains to be seen. The U.S. anti-war movement grows as the situation in Iraq deteriorates. But with competing accounts of the nature of the Empire and its new imperialism, the defensive character of the anti-war movement is not likely to morph into an offensive anti-imperialism. Many Americans may not like what the Empire is or does, but without a clear understanding and agreement over *why it does what it does*, the struggle against U.S. imperialism will remain mired in simplistic calls to "Bring the Troops Home"; a necessary step, yes, but not enough to combat the imperial beast that Mann and Harvey describe. **R**

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Utopian Toronto in the Neoliberal Economy

Yen Chu

uTOpia: Towards A New Toronto
Edited by Jason McBride & Alana Wilcox
Coach House Books, 287 pp.

Over the past several years, Toronto has been undergoing a revitalization – a new opera house, the never-ending development of condos and lofts, and new innovative architecture, including the new OCAD building and additions to the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum. The revitalization, along with the election of David Miller, has some feeling the city is heading in a new hopeful direction. This sentiment is expressed in *uTOpia: Towards a new Toronto*, an anthology that asks: how would you improve Toronto?

While the editors, Jason McBride & Alana Wilcox, acknowl-

edge that Toronto has its problems such as crime and the lack of affordable housing, they wanted contributors to focus on the positive aspects of Toronto. They wanted to look at "what the city had done and was doing right and how that activity could lay the groundwork for an even better city." There's something disconcerting in a book that asks how we can improve a city and then intentionally ignores its social problems. Perhaps this is why they can put a lot faith into a mayor who has done nothing to ameliorate Toronto's housing problems and hasn't campaigned for repealing the Safe Streets Act.

To be fair, the editors do qualify that the book covers a small cross section of the city. This cross section belongs to the creative class; it is mostly white, often privileged, and always hip. This utopia is not in the same tradition as William Morris or

Edward Bellamy where they imagined a future that would benefit society as a whole. Although somewhat fantastical and lacking a class analysis, Morris and Bellamy's works at least offered a critique of capitalism. *uTopia*, on the other hand, offers a postmodernist hodge podge of ideas, with a primary focus on culture. The eclectic mix of 32 essays, breezy, playful, exuberant and thoughtful, all convey a love of Toronto, but not all express the same enthusiasm in the city's transformation. While some writers imagine what they would like Toronto to be, others question the concept of utopia itself.

In Heather Maclean's essay on gentrification, *Go west young hipster*, she writes that art and culture play an integral role in promoting Toronto as a hip place to live and do business. As cities move from a manufacturing base to a service economy, they strive to become world-class cities as a way to increase revenue by attracting developers, service economy businesses, property owners, and tourists – often resulting in gentrification. Gentrification brings both welcome and unwelcomed changes. It can revitalize an area, but it can also homogenize a neighbourhood and push out diverse working class residents. The free market of gentrification can also be a source of conflict for more well-off residents. Maclean reports on the efforts of the Queen West Residents Association to slow down the proliferation of bars that have rapidly sprung up in their neighbourhood. The residents, mostly professionals, quickly discover that even they have difficulty in having a say in the development and planning of their neighbourhood. For some, Queen West is becoming an ideal place for an active nightlife, for others it means increased traffic and noise. The question then becomes whose utopia is this?

Deanne Taylor addresses this question in her essay, *Between utopias*. With a dash of whimsy, she argues that Toronto is two cities – one real and one virtual. The real city is the everyday life of its citizens and the virtual city is the spin the media and businesses use to shape Toronto as the "City That Goes Ka-Ching." The virtual city is the corporate utopia where "Toronto is real estate and ad apace, citizens are consumers, city hall is a business facilitator and politics and extension of deal making." However, there is nothing virtual about this utopia, rather it is much too real with real consequences; it's not just a corporate ideal, but today's lived reality. Taylor's essay makes evident that utopia is not universal; there are conflicting interests in what an ideal city should be.

She views the election of David Miller with caution. She praises him for his success in ending the expansion of the airport, but she recognizes his limitations as mayor. She believes that the corporate utopia can only be resisted and fought by all citizens of a community to protect their small-scale, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use neighbourhoods, which urban theorist Jane Jacobs sees as an ideal city. Her view is supported by most contributors in this book with the exception of Mark Kingwell.

In *architecture and utopia*, Kingwell dissents from the Jacobs



view of a livable city, arguing that her model of small-scale neighbourhoods leads to gentrification and lacks any grand vision. While he sees utopia as being potentially 'foolish' and 'dangerous,' he also feels it is necessary because it gives us hope for a better future. We need grand visions and Jacobs' model stifles those visions and inspirations. He laments the emptiness of the old Varsity Stadium site and blames the Jane Jacobians and academics for preventing the construction of a new stadium because they opposed the rowdy crowds the stadium would bring. His finger pointing extends further, as he writes, "Blockage is progress; resistance is self-evident; ambition is suspect. The old thin-lipped Puritan disapproval of ostentation has merged smoothly with the grievance politics of the multicultural moment, forging an alliance of surprising resilience." What multiculturalism has to do with football stadiums is left unexplained.

Where Kingwell sees 'every good building' as 'inevitably utopian,' Adam Vaughan sees people as a source of utopia. In *An age-old idea* he writes: "Magnificent old buildings may define our past and new monuments may house our future, but only people give structure to structure." And after mentioning the cuts to social spending he writes: "As we ignored the homeless sleeping on the streets, the buildings on the same streets also seemed to lose their beauty." True, that's why the city's police ticket the homeless for panhandling and that's why we have the Safe Streets Act. We can have devastating social problems, but still have innovative architecture, beautiful art, and cool places to go. In fact this is what is happening in cities across the globe where urban revitalization is creating aesthetic utopias alongside social dystopias.

The anthology's mostly social democratic politics sets up a framework in which improving the city is placed in the context of adapting to neoliberal globalization. *uTopia* offers no hope for an alternative to capitalism, nor do they, for the most part, want one. In the anthology's first essay *Toronto a city in our image*, Erik Rutherford compares Toronto to Paris. He describes Toronto as 'a young man, just out of university. He's done a degree in commerce with a minor in the humanities.' Paris, on the other hand, "is well past her finest hour." At least in Paris, they fight for a better future. Their victory gives this Torontonians hope. **R**

Yen Chu is working on a book about race and class in Toronto.



Scenes from the March 18th Stop the War demonstration in Toronto
Photographs by John MacLennan