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A SOCIALIST PROJECT REVIEW



**FOCUS ON
MEXICO**

**UPRISING IN OAXACA • IVORY TOWER CRISIS
KURDISH STRUGGLE • CUPE'S PALESTINE CAMPAIGN
WAR & THE MEDIA • RENEWING DEMOCRACY**



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About Relay

Relay, A Socialist Project Review, intends to act as a forum for conveying and debating current issues of importance to the Left in Ontario, Canada and from around the world. Contributions to the re-laying of the foundations for a viable socialist politics are welcomed by the editorial committee.

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About the Socialist Project

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

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Renewing Democracy in Ontario

From the Top Down

Bryan Evans

Throughout Canada, as in much of the world, over the past 20 or so years there has been a marked decline in voter turnout. This general though uneven trend cuts across class, gender, racial, age and regional lines. So what's up is the question political elites began to pose a few years ago as the threat that the very legitimacy of the political institutions which manage and organize capitalism may be eroding beyond the point of retrieval. The response has been, again, uneven, but from PEI to BC, governments of all shades have been talking about 'engaging citizens' and 'democratic renewal.' Upon forming a government in the Fall of 2003, Ontario's Liberal McGuinty government established a Democratic Renewal Secretariat to spearhead the process of deepening and expanding democracy in Ontario. So what has this meant and should we care?

Well, of course we should care, and care deeply but is this really the democracy we want and, in fact, desperately need? An Ontario Citizen's Assembly has in fact begun to work on reviewing and ultimately will likely propose changes to how our electoral system works. What is astonishing is not that the media have virtually ignored this process but at how limited the mandate of the Assembly is. In addition, the process which has been embarked upon is so fundamentally exclusionary that one cannot help but wonder, what is this really about? One conclusion is that this is not exactly what one might think of as a democratization project with democracy and citizen engagement as its foremost objects.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL IN ONTARIO: WHAT'S HAPPENED SO FAR?

Before unpacking what this is and what it is not, let's review what the democratic renewal project, as conceived by the McGuinty Government, has achieved to date. In 2003 and 2004, the McGuinty government introduced various pieces of legislation in the name of democratic renewal to do the following: Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation would now have to disclose the names and salaries of all employees earning more than 100 K per year; similarly, freedom of information legislation was changed to apply to hydro companies as well; Cabinet ministers would be required to attend two-thirds of Question Periods in the Legislature; the Provincial Auditor's powers were expanded to cover the broader public sector meaning hospitals, school boards, universities, and government corporations, and partisan gov-

ernment advertising was banned. Little of this received much attention and, notwithstanding the merit in some of these 'reforms', one can see why. Are you feeling engaged yet? No? Well, for the most part this is all the stuff of good, accountable government – government doing what it should minimally do. It's hardly the stuff of an expanding and deepening democracy. But then, it's not meant to be.

The media gave much more profile to the fixed election date legislation which was introduced in late 2005 which establishes that Ontario elections will take place every four years sharp. This certainly limits the power of the premier to tinker with when to dissolve the Legislature but as with the previously noted changes, it is all very much based in the practices within the environment of the Legislature. A place most Ontarians have never been to.

THE ONTARIO CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY: EXPANDING DEMOCRACY OR LIMITING THE VISION?

Somewhat more interesting were amendments made to the Elections Act in 2005 which gave Elections Ontario, the institution which manages the electoral process and party financing in Ontario, with the power to select volunteers to sit on a Citizens' Jury on Political Finance Reform and a Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform. The Citizen's Assembly is the most intriguing as its mandate is to "consider how Ontarians elect their representatives. The Assembly may recommend a different electoral system from our current first-past-the-post system, in which case the government will hold a referendum on that alternative within its current mandate." Any recommendation for change will be put to a province-wide referendum in October 2007. This Assembly, chosen over the spring and summer of 2006, is composed of 103 individuals, one from each constituency.

The process of determining this final 103 from an initial random call, based on the voters list, of 12,000 citizens is worth further exploration given the numbers of persons who would have been excluded from the voters list or not reachable due to residence relocation, homelessness, citizenship status etc. And, the fact that, a large numbers of those initially screened in, when invited, declined due to lack of interest and/or resources such as time, language, and the simple certain level of confidence required to participate in such a process. A socio-economic profile of these special 103 would

perhaps be revealing given how resource intensive participation in the assembly must be. It is hard to imagine a logger, retail worker, autoworker, administrative assistant or teacher for that matter being in a position to heed such an invitation even if one were highly interested.

While the agenda of the assembly is richer than simply the mechanics of electing legislative representatives, it is this aspect which is really at the heart of the project. Which model to recommend is what the assembly will deliberate – status, quo, pure proportional representation or some other variation such as the single-transferable vote, all heady stuff. And not unimportant. But the diagnosis says citizens are disengaged and the remedy is to re-engage them with electoral reform. How much water does this carry? It's difficult to say but just what if the disengagement, apathy, what ever you wish to call it is more complex than what a redesigned electoral system can correct?

This brings us back to the very limited scope of the democratic renewal process in Ontario. It's focused on the internal functioning of the Legislature and now, perhaps, toward renovating the electoral machinery. It speaks nothing of the lack of time and other resources needed to fully participate in political life and activity and more crucially it says nothing about the diminished role and therefore meaning of the state and public sector in the everyday lived lives of so many people. The 103 members of the Assembly will spend 6 weeks in September to December 2006 learning about electoral systems. Nice work if you can get it...and have the time. Again, there's a disconnect here.

So, what is at the root of political apathy, disengagement, and significant voter indifference? Not having political choices available which reflect the full-range of issues and values in society is a significant aspect. Jurisdictions which employ some form of proportional representation tend to have healthier voter turnout for elections and this must in part be due to a wider spectrum of political voices able to gain access to representative institutions. There are exceptions to this however. The Citizens' Assembly will study proportional representations models and perhaps make a recommendation on a different electoral model. The scuttlebutt however, is that there is a preference to see a single transferable vote (STV) model recommended, if any change at all is to be suggested. Again, it's all in the details which have not emerged however STV can be complex and therefore the mechanics of arriving at a 'winner' is not obvious. The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly recommended such a system last year and it was defeated in the referendum.

Looked at comparatively, there is a relatively high correspondence between jurisdictions where there is a robust and meaningful public sector which delivers a significant range of public goods and services such as comprehensive health care, education, housing, social security etc. and comparatively high levels of voter turnout. Jurisdictions with more anemic provision of public services tend toward the lower end of participation. Interestingly, neither the Citizens' Assembly nor the Democratic Renewal Secretariat is looking at

how to make the public sector more meaningful to the lives of Ontarians. Relatedly, why does the Democratic Renewal initiative not consider new forms of accountability, and god knows we here nothing but talk about accountability, which makes ministers and senior public managers accountable to these same producers and consumers rather than accountable to those who make decisions about individual careers?

It's also been demonstrated that political knowledge is a key element in determining if one is going to participate in the process. If the government is really interested in engaging citizens and reversing the decline in voter participation why not provide the structures and resources to deepen the awareness and knowledge of political issues throughout Ontario society rather than expending efforts on bringing a special 103 individuals up to speed.

A GENUINE DEMOCRACY AGENDA

Let's face it, a real democratic renewal process would at a minimum provide for the following:

1) Meaningful Electoral Reform

Ontario requires a Proportional Representation model which includes a direct link between votes received and the allocation of legislative representatives. This will ensure small parties have some chance of gaining voice in the election process and in the Legislative Assembly. Moreover, it will likely, though not necessarily, ensure that no party can win a majority of seats without winning a majority of the vote. Consequently, any cabinet would be required to include representatives of other political groupings or at the least work closely with the opposition parties.

2) Expanding Democracy in Ontario's Political and Public Service Institutions

- a) The first order of duty is to abolish monarchical and colonial symbols. These are not just quaint historical legacies, they in fact shape and direct political processes and culture within the Ontario state and Ontario society.
- b) Establish a democratic accountability framework which would ensure ministers and senior public managers in the public service are responsive to citizens as producers of public services and as users of those same services. Currently the accountability regime is strictly hierarchical and highly centralized. In short, if you want to climb the career ladder, you better follow the direction of those above you. Therefore a new forum – a Public Services Producers and Users Council – is to be established where those who deliver the services – the workers – and those who use them – the citizens – can make recommendations on how to make the system →

better and monitor the progress in making those changes.

- c) Access to information held by government is critical. Existing freedom of information laws are not designed to allow for genuine access. In fact, they are designed to control access. It's vitally important that citizens' have access to the myriad of documents produced within the state which reveal what options were considered and why in making policy decisions, in the awarding of contracts, and in the hiring of public servants.

3) Expanding Democracy In Our Lived Lives

a) To meaningfully participate in political life requires time. Working people and their families know this is a rare resource. However, to become involved in a political party or organization, community group, union, or movement requires that a person have the time to do so. Any meaningful democratization project must address this. A minimum step would be to legislatively reduce maximum working hour to 35 hours/week with no loss in pay and to expand vacation entitlements and rights to take short-term leaves with a guaranteed right to return to work.

b) Related to the general question of time is the necessity for universal day care. This is crucial

if anyone is serious about a greater role for woman in political life.

c) Bringing democracy into the workplace where most of us spend a great deal, and growing amount of time, is essential. Workplace councils are required to provide working people with the power to make crucial decisions respecting health and safety, regulating the number of hours worked, coordinating applications for leaves, and as a forum in which to increase political learning within the workplace.

d) Participation requires a minimum level of income therefore establishing a living wage policy so that individuals have at least some financial resources beyond the minimum is again a prerequisite to deepening democracy.

The long and short of it is that Ontario's democratic renewal project has been defined so narrowly that the objective of renewing democracy may very well result in a further erosion in the legitimacy of the limited version of democracy which currently exists. The minimum program proposed here is not revolutionary in the slightest and can easily be implemented...if the will and desire for genuine democratic renewal was there. **R**

Bryan Evans teaches public administration at Ryerson University.

Follow the Money:

Development and Municipal Campaign Finances

Robert MacDermid



The endless single family suburban housing tracts that radiate outwards from Toronto through Mississauga, Brampton, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Markham, Pickering and the like are the shameful failure of municipal planning to pay any attention to scale and society in urban form. The clogged arterial suburban roads, the rising work and leisure commute times, limited or non-existent public transit, crowded schools, few recreation facilities, the absence of housing forms like apartments, public housing, seniors housing, or cooperatives, small low-rent storefronts and mixed commercial space, and the high rates of taxation to pay for expensive sewer and water infrastructure extensions, are all symptoms of the failure of suburban development to build a multi-layered human

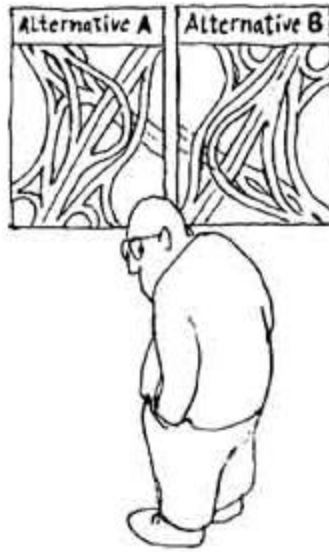
community. While the city of Toronto is somewhat different, it has similar planning issue. But here centered on the mushrooming of high-rise condominiums that overwhelm residential neighbourhoods and threaten to cover the waterfront.

Municipal politics is – and municipal elections ought to be – a forum for planning issues since the substance of municipal politics is the regulation of land, building and zoning. Developers have always understand the role of municipal politics in development so it shouldn't be surprising that municipal election campaigns are overwhelmingly funded by corporations and to a very large extent by the development industry. Yet, there has been almost no systematic study of municipal campaign finance. I recently studied the 2003 municipal elections in Toronto and nine surrounding cities. The extent to which the development industry supports municipal candidates who favour rapid and ill-considered development is truly astonishing. (The full study is available at: www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2006/MacDermid.pdf).

DEVELOPMENT MONEY AND THE SUBURBS

Across the nine suburban cities surrounding Toronto examined in the study, corporations provided two-thirds of the contributions greater than \$100 (97% of contributions) to all candidates. Eighty percent of contributions to candidates in Vaughan came from corporations. The next biggest group of financial backers of suburban candidates was the would-be office holders themselves who, on average, self-financed a greater portion of their campaigns than contributions they received from citizens. Averages mask extremes, and in some cities the winning candidates were backed almost entirely by corporate funds. In Vaughan, 7 of 9 members of the elected Vaughan council received more than 75% of their 2003 funding from corporations, and three had more than 90% of disclosed funding coming from that source.

While this funding is objectionable on the grounds that those who own or control corporations can give once through a



company and again as individuals, there might be less concern if all corporations and industries gave equally to all politicians. But in the suburban cities, over two thirds of the disclosed corporate money came from development and development related companies such as building supplies and trades companies. More than a dozen contending candidates and some winners had greater than 80% of all of their funding from development and development related companies. The patterns of development industry contribution were even more targeted, going in a very pronounced way to winners. These patterns suggest careful orchestration where lobbyists and other political consultants using developers' contributions groom and systematically support only pro-development candidates. The Bellamy Inquiry into the Toronto computer leasing scandal revealed just such a network of influencers operating through campaign contributions.

TORONTO ELECTIONS

The City of Toronto 2003 elections had similar but less extreme contribution patterns. Development and development related companies gave just over 43% of all of the corporate money and all money from corporations made up just over one-third of all of the money going to candidates in Toronto. Toronto councilors' reliance on development money was less pronounced but there were still some councilors who

took more than 40% of all disclosed 2003 contributions from the development industry including Frank Di Giorgio, Michael Feldman, both more than 60% development funded, David Shiner, over 50% and Gerry Altobello, Kyle Rae (highest dollar total of \$39,000), Peter Li Preti, Giorgio Mammoliti, Brian Ashton, John Filion, Peter Milczyn and Denzil Minan-Wong. Vote Toronto's website has all of the figures (www.votetoronto.ca).

Something surprising is happening in the 2006 elections. A growing number of candidates led by the four sitting Toronto councilor members, David Miller and Jane Pitfield, mayoralty candidates and Michael Walker and Cliff Jenkins along with other candidates in Toronto and elsewhere like Steven Parish, the Mayor of Ajax, are refusing to take money from corporations and developers. Many candidates, possibly as many as one hundred others in the GTA are making similar pledges in the belief that voters have had enough of development friendly councils and the planning disasters of suburban Toronto. Citizen groups like Vote Toronto have led the way in revealing the funding story and environmental and other citizen groups are pressing candidates about their funding.

CORPORATE CONTRIBUTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

Banning corporate contributions would not end attempts by developers to influence politicians. The planning process would have to be more open and democratic and people would need to be actively concerned with the process of creating their own urban environment. Some have already taken up this challenge, and that is partly why Toronto politics is more openly about the issues of development. Building the places we live in should not just be about enriching wealthy land developers. Municipal politics must reflect the needs of livable cities and to achieve that we need a campaign finance system that excludes the dominating influence of development interests. **R**

Robert MacDermid teaches political science at York University.

An Issue in Trusts:

THE NEOLIBERAL TROJAN HORSE FOR TAX CUTS

Travis William Fast



During the first week of October the Canadian financial press was buzzing on the news that Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE) was converting from a publicly traded corporation to an income trust. The financial press framed the issue as “the end of era.” That era referred to a time when the state took a more activist role in the regulation and production of public goods. In central Canada the public good of telephone service was provided not through a crown corporation but rather through a privately owned and publicly traded corporation Bell Canada. The basic deal was that Bell would be given exclusive jurisdiction to provide phone service over a defined geographic area. In return Bell would agree to provide phone service to more remote and rural areas where the fixed costs exceeded the possibility of recouping those costs let alone making a profit. Moreover the tariff charges were to be regulated by the CRTC, which in turn guaranteed that Bell shareholders received an ironclad return on their investment (ROI).

It is therefore interesting that the financial press choose to describe BCE’s conversion as the end of an era. In fact the old BCE with its iron-clad revenue stream owing to its state granted monopoly resembles the neoliberal model of providing public goods: public private partnerships where the public indemnifies private shareholders against risk and the profits generated are returned not to the public but to the private purse.

But there is a way in which the conversion of BCE into an income trust is exemplary of another hallmark of neoliberalism: namely, regulatory arbitrage. Regulatory arbitrage describes a situation in which corporations adjust their corporate structure to take

advantage of geographically advantageous tax and regulatory regimes. The classic case is where a transnational corporation locates its head office in its home country but carries out production in another jurisdiction to take advantage of their tax and labour laws. This phenomenon itself generates pressures in the home country to lower corporate tax rates and labour standards in a bid to keep their transnationals at home (kind of like the patriarchal power play where a man takes a lover and then uses that leverage to extract concessions from his wife in the kitchen and bedroom). Sometimes we see this same practice within a single country like Canada when in the mid- 1990s corporate head offices moved from BC to Alberta to take advantage of Alberta’s lower corporate tax regime. Often times politicians duck the question of regulatory arbitrage as a *fait accompli* by invoking the following observation: Canada has no power with respect to corporate tax rates in other national jurisdictions. Therefore, to stay competitive, it is argued, that Canada must reduce its corporate tax rates.

What is so stunning about the trust option is that it has nothing to do with inter-state or provincial regulatory jurisdictions. How then can trusts be used as a lever for regulatory arbitrage when the government is the source of the very regulatory competition it is said requires the lowering of corporate taxes? Before we answer that question (as if it were not already obvious) it is instructive to see how exactly the trust conversion transfers tax revenue from the public to private shareholders. To do so we have constructed two scenarios using the Department of Finance’s simplified tax model.

SCENARIO A: BCE STAYS AS A PUBLICLY TRADED COMPANY

In the 2005 Annual Report, BCE reports paying \$893,000,000 in corporate income tax (CIT). It further reports a dividend payout of +/- \$1,473,000,000 including common and preferred shares. Using the Department of Finance's simplified model we can estimate how much tax was paid on the dividend. The basic model assumes that 39% of dividends flow to non-sheltered Canadian residents (taxable), 22% flows to non-Canadian residents, and the remaining 39% to non-taxable entities. Hence only 61% of dividends are taxed in any given fiscal year. Of that, the taxable resident portion is taxed at an effective rate of 22 percent and the non-resident amount is taxed at 15 percent. We can thus compute the total CIT and personal income tax paid on the dividend which equals \$1,067,992,400.

BCE Dividend Payout \$1,473,000,000			
Category of Shareholder	% of Dividend	Tax rate	Tax Paid
Resident Taxable	39 % = 574,470,000	@ 22%	\$ 126,383,400
Non-resident Taxable	22 % = 324,060,000	@ 15%	\$ 48,609,000
Non-Taxable	39 % = 574,470,000	@ 0 %	\$ 0
Total tax on Dividend payout			\$ 174,992,400
Add BCE CIT			\$ 893,000,000
Total CIT + IT on Dividend payout (2005)			\$1,067,992,400

All assumptions based on Figure 3. Simplified Example of Taxes Paid Under a Corporate Structure.

SCENARIO B: BCE CONVERTS INTO AN INCOME TRUST

The basic structure of income trust works as follows. Stage 1: Company A acts as the trustee of Trust X into which company A transfers all cash after all operating expenses are paid out to Trust X. The tax advantage is that no CIT is levied on this transfer. As such, the \$893,000,000 million paid out in CIT by BCE is forgone by the government. Stage 2: the \$893,000,000 that would have been taxed is added to the \$1,473,000,000 which was previously paid out as dividends which sums to the princely total of \$2,366,000,000. This sum is then distributed according to the same model as that used in Scenario A above with adjusted tax rates.

BCE Trust Cash distribution \$2,366,000,000.			
Category of Shareholder	% Cash Distribution	Tax rate	Tax Paid
Resident Taxable	39 % = 922,740,000	@ 38%	\$ 350,641,200
Non-resident Taxable	22 % = 520,520,000	@ 15%	\$ 78,078,000
Non-Taxable	39 % = 922,740,000	@ 0 %	\$ 0
Total tax on Cash Distribution			\$ 428,719,200
Add BCE CIT		@35%	\$ 0
Total Tax			\$ 428,719,200

All assumptions based on Figure 4. Simplified Example of Taxes Paid Under a Traditional Income Trust Structure.

ASSESSING THE TAX IMPLICATIONS

To approximate what the total net transfer is from Canadians to the shareholders of BCE is all we need to do is take the total from scenario A of \$1,067,992,400 and subtract the total from scenario B of \$ 428,719,200 which equals \$639,273,200 in forgone annual tax revenue. This should hardly be a surprise given that the Department of Finance's model suggests that the conversion to trusts reduces the effective tax rate on corporate profits from 42.85% to 18.12%. If we were to annualize these results for ten years, leaving aside compound interest, BCE's conversion represents a net transfer of over 6 billion dollars from Canadians as a whole to private shareholders. In a more conservative study by Jack M. Mintz, Professor of Business Economics at the University of Toronto it is estimated that the total annual cost of *all trust conversions* to date is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 1.1 billion dollars in forgone revenue. While Mintz thinks this is not significant compared to the total stream of tax revenue it is significant if compared to specific areas of program funding. Imagine what health care or education funding would look like over the next ten years with an injection of 11 billion dollars.

And yet it is not just forgone revenue that is at issue when considering the ramifications of income trusts. We also need to consider the implications of trust conversions on economic growth and high quality employment contracts. Consider for example that the increase in revenue flowing to investors has been achieved via regulatory arbitrage. Not one new product is brought to market, nor is productivity increased, nor is a single job created (save a couple of lawyers and accountants) to "create" this "value" for shareholders. This gives the lie to all the neoliberal supply side arguments that taxing capital is inefficient. What is inefficient is providing tax giveaways to shareholders of companies that produce nothing save a drag on the revenue of the state and a termination stub to unionized employees.

All of this of course brings us back to the question of how it is that regulatory arbitrage can be used as lever for tax cuts on corporations and capital income when the source of that arbitrage are regulations made by the same level of government within the same national jurisdiction? Already the case is being made that because trusts are taxed more favourably than equity-based corporations, equity based corporate structures should have their taxes decreased to level the playing field. We never hear that there would not be a tax advantage but for the possibility of converting into a trust in the first place.

Lastly it must also be pointed out that trusts are structured to flow through cash back to investors and as such are a poor vehicle for growing the enterprise because very little cash is retained for future growth. Indeed the tax incentive at 45% on retained cash distributions by the trust from the trustee drive in the direction of the starvation of operations because any excess retained cash is taxed at a higher level than the standard corporate tax rate. The knock on effect of all this is going to be a call for lower corporate tax rates then lower capital gains taxes. Hence trusts are a Trojan- Horse for corporate tax cuts.

The only way to get out of this neoliberal beggar thyself policy wheel is to get rid of the trust laws as written and the problem of national regulatory arbitrage disappears. Of course, →

to do so would also mean that income trusts as a mechanism for the intergenerational preservation of the wealthy class would also disappear: two birds with one stone; not bad for a day's legislative work. **R**

Sources: This article is based on a series of posts originally published at Canadian Observer: www.canadianobserver.wordpress.com. The sources for the calculations are from Bell Canada annual reports at www.bce.ca/data/documents/BCE_annual_2005_en.pdf, the Department of

Finance's website on corporate tax structures at www.fin.gc.ca/activty/pubs/toirplf_1e.html#_Inc. In the scenarios presented, there is no consideration of future tax payments on retirement income. The deferred tax implications are another matter, although they also extend tax breaks to the wealthy. What is of concern here is the immediate forgone annual tax revenue due to unwarranted corporate tax breaks.

Travis Fast teaches political economy at York University.

The Major-General and Canada's War in Afghanistan

Leo Panitch

Former Canadian Major-General Lewis MacKenzie is proving to be one of the major propagandists for the Canadian intervention in Afghanistan in the national press (see his "Remember the Taliban and stay the course," *Globe and Mail*, 10 October 2006). But MacKenzie's convoluted and misleading representation of history in his defense of Canada's military operations in Afghanistan only reinforces the case for why we should get out immediately and stop sacrificing people's lives there on both sides to no good end (see his: "There's 'tradition' and then there's getting the job done," *Globe and Mail*, 6 September 2006).

If Canadians are proud of our peacekeeping missions in the past, even though they were only a 'sideline activity' as compared with the 10,000 soldiers we had stationed with NATO in Germany, it is precisely because they recognize that being 'ready and waiting for the Soviet hordes (sic) to attack across the East German border' was not much to be proud of. Insofar as our 'top priority' was indeed stopping the Soviet 'hordes' (MacKenzie search for such a word in this context even mimics the Bush ad-

ministration in its distasteful rhetoric), this was, in fact, part and parcel of our entrapment in the Cold War hysteria that framed so much of American policy (foreign and domestic). Canada's own independent assessments and better judgment regarding the actual intentions of the USSR were compromised by our lack of independence from the USA. MacKenzie's dismissal as but a myth Canadians' desire for an independent policy, bolstered by the astonishing claim that Lester Pearson's role in the Suez Crisis effectively amounted to taking a stand on the side of Egypt, only furthers obfuscates matters. It was the U.S. position that we effectively were supporting, given its displeasure at being blindsided by the British, French and Israeli invasion, and it was this that provided the space for Pearson's initiatives at the UN to have effect.

In the real world, of course, the question of whether Canada would take an 'independent stand' has mainly been about whether we would take a stand different from that of British or American policy. The stand we are taking in Afghanistan today is blatantly lacking in such independence, and the mess we are in today there is entirely due to the terrible mess that the Bush and Blair governments have made in that part of the world. It is only this that is 'crystal clear.' This certainly cannot be said of a NATO mission that involves pretending that a regime led by a former CIA agent in alliance with war lords can ever engender 'competent Afghan military forces controlled in their efforts by a democratically elected national government.' Even a retired major-general should know better than to conjure such harmful illusions in the interests of war-making. **R**



The Canadian embassy in Washington showcases Canada's role in the 'war on terror.'

Leo Panitch teaches at York University and is co-editor of Socialist Register.

Building the CUPE Campaign for Justice in Palestine

Katherine Nastovski

On the weekend of October 6-8, 2006, the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA) organized a conference exploring the reality of the Israeli apartheid state and collectively discussing how to build a movement to boycott, divest and impose sanctions (BDS) against these policies and practices. Over 600 people attended this conference. One of the workshops considered the role of trade unionists in a BDS campaign. Union BDS campaigns were an important part of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, and the South African trade union central, COSATU, has called for a similar campaign in support of Palestinian national self-determination. This presentation was part of the trade union panel, and follows up on the Canadian Union of Public Employees-Ontario (CUPE) passage of a path-breaking resolution challenging Israeli apartheid at its May 2006 Convention.

The CUPE Ontario Resolution 50 in support of Palestinian struggles and an education and boycott campaign of Israel reads as follows:

1. With Palestine solidarity and human rights organizations, develop an education campaign about the apartheid nature of the Israeli and the political and economic support of Canada for these practices.
2. Support the international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law including the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

3. Call on the National to commit to research into Canadian involvement in the occupation and call on the CLC to join us in lobbying against the apartheid-like practices of the Israeli state call for the immediate dismantling of the wall.

BECAUSE:

- The Israeli Apartheid Wall has been condemned and determined illegal under international law;
- Over 170 Palestinian political parties, unions and other organizations including the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions issued a call in July 2005 for a global campaign of boycotts and divestment against Israel similar to those imposed against South African Apartheid; and
- CUPE BC has firmly and vocally condemned the occupation of Palestine and have initiated an education campaign about the apartheid-like practices of the Israeli state.

I will begin with the context within CUPE. A Palestine solidarity resolution first came to the floor at the 2001 CUPE National convention. It was defeated. A new CUPE national policy was later adopted at the 2003 convention. This was submitted by a local in BC and called on CUPE to lobby the Canadian government to call for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, an end to violence and a movement toward a negotiated settlement. Similar resolutions for ending the occupation were adopted in various provincial divisions including Ontario in 2002. →



Also in 2003, CUPE BC's International solidarity committee – with the backing and funding of their provisional division and CUPE national – published an educational pamphlet on Palestine called *The Wall Must Fall*. This booklet has served as a great resource for activists in our union. It is available on the CUPE BC and the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA) websites. It has been copied and distributed in the tens of thousands.

Resolution 50 that was submitted to this year's convention was written collaboratively with CAIA. The resolution was submitted by 3 CUPE locals, the CUPE Toronto District Council and the CUPE Ontario International Solidarity Committee. It tried to reflect as closely as possible the call from within Palestine from over 170 civil organizations for boycott, divestment, and sanctions against the Zionist state (available at www.caiaweb.org/activistresources). The resolution calls for support of the International BDS campaign until Israel recognizes the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and compliance with United Nations resolution 194 on the right of return for the Palestinian people. To do this, it calls on the union to initiate and education campaign, do research and call on the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) to join us in lobbying. It passed with no one speaking against it.

Immediately a press release was sent out publicising the resolution. This began a long and vicious media battle that included serious harassment of CUPE and its officials, including threats of bombs and death. In spite of this intimidation, CUPE Ontario President Sid Ryan and the Ontario division staff were clear and strong in response to the media attacks.

The response from organized labour – from CAW president Buzz Hargrove's condemnation of the resolution to the silence of the majority of unions – has been discouraging. The CLC also remained silent, which I suppose, in the context of its past history of support on this issue and on South African Apartheid, is prob-

ably the best that can be hoped for at the moment. We should not expect or wait to get their blessing.

The controversy around Resolution 50 has raised the debate within unions across the country, which as one CAIA member commented, "forces opponents to engage with the idea of Israel as an apartheid state." There were attempts to buy-off union leadership to get them to sign on to public letters condemning CUPE Ontario. These have been rejected. And while this surely won't stop further attempts at co-option, the silence of most unions has at least created an easier climate for rank and file activists to organize.

PUSHING ON IN CUPE

Within CUPE, there were persistent calls to CUPE locals across the country immediately following the convention. How many of those calls came from CUPE members as opposed to the general public is hard to know. I would venture to say that, given the responses of the Canadian Jewish Congress and the B'nai Brith, a good number of them may well not have come from CUPE members. A newspaper ad and a protest were organized by a couple of Jewish social services locals that had already disaffiliated from CUPE Ontario after the 2002 resolution. CUPE National has not been supportive.

Since July, the international solidarity committee in collaboration with CAIA has been developing an action plan for the year. It began with a float at the Toronto Labour Day Parade which was, by far, the highlight of the parade. There, we distributed cards that were produced by CUPE Ontario on the resolution with information on the CAIA conference. The action plan centres on an education tour, which we have scheduled to begin towards the end of November and continue through March.

On the 21st of October CUPE-Ontario will be testing a module for doing workshops on BDS, and will have a wider training session with members from across the province on the 18th of November. We are looking to develop a rank and file speakers committee that will go to district council meetings, general membership meetings of locals and possibly also labour councils. In the meantime, we hope to compile some interim materials to begin distributing as soon as possible at events being organized in October. The idea is to work toward developing a booklet that includes an initial BDS strategy for the union. This booklet will hopefully become a resource for labour activists more broadly.

So now we are working in the International Solidarity Committee of CUPE to build capacity to move forward on Resolution 50. It may be overwhelming to look at how much work lies ahead. But we should also be really excited by the potential for building some serious capacity for rank and file international solidarity. **R**

Katherine Nastovski is Chair of CUPE Ontario's International Solidarity Committee.



Unionists and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle: Lessons from the South African Experience

Ken Luckhardt

Nothing To Apartheid!!!
Nothing From Apartheid!!!
Israeli Apartheid, that is.....!!!

The first two slogans will remind many of the mobilization for international sanctions against apartheid South Africa some twenty years ago. Some activists focused on consumer actions in the marketplace, some took action at the point of production and/or at the site of a service sector connection with South Africa, while bank and pension fund divestments were the institutional targets for others. The ultimate victory of the international sanctions campaigns was grounded in the fundamental principles of, and support for, a non-racial democracy and anti-imperialism. No victory would have been possible of course without the courage and determination of black South Africans and their allies inside the walls of apartheid to end this “crime against humanity.”

There is a tendency to think of apartheid as unique to South Africa. Apartheid could be narrowly defined, both descriptively and geographically, to make that a truism. Such a definition however would be an unproductive exercise and a political mistake. To begin with, it would fail to acknowledge that the basic pillars of apartheid oppression in South Africa (the Pass Laws and the bantustans) were modeled in large part on the Canadian colonial laws and institutions (the Indian Act and reservation system) imposed on First Nations.

Such a narrow definition of apartheid would also limit our analysis of equally oppressive “crime(s) against humanity” which are rooted in similar structures of oppression. The Zionist state of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinian people comes readily to mind. Exploited and unfree Palestinian labour, displaced to postage stamp plots on the occupier’s terms, all enforced by a ruthless military regime supported by



western capitalist allies. All this adds up pretty clearly to “Israeli apartheid” in the opinion of more and more people the world over. When Nelson Mandela, Bishop Desmond Tutu and Willie Mandisha of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, all deem the Israeli oppression of Palestinian people as the equivalent of apartheid, the social and political conclusions should be clear.

There is a need to move from these political conclusions to a different set of questions:

- Is there the political will to mount an international sanctions, boycott and divestment campaign against Israeli apartheid equal to that mounted against apartheid South Africa?
- Are the personal commitments and resources sufficient to sustain such a campaign (keeping in mind that the call for sanctions against South Africa came at least 25 years before the international momentum reached a critical threshold?)
- Will it not be even more difficult to tackle Israeli apartheid given the

massive propaganda machine that the Zionist state has created with the support of virtually all ruling classes and political elites in the developed capitalist world?

In addressing these questions, there may be a benefit in looking back to some of the methods that worked and lessons that were learned in the international campaigns against apartheid South Africa. The focus here is on the political work done primarily within the Canadian labour movement by the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) Solidarity Committee (Canada).

A POLITICAL CALL FROM THE OPPRESSED PEOPLE THEMSELVES

The African National Congress (ANC), SACTU and other member organizations of the Congress Alliance all called for the total isolation of South Africa in the early 1960s. The Congress Alliance represented the overwhelming majority of the oppressed majority – Africans, so-called Indian South Africans, ‘coloureds’—and also progressive white South Africans. Its call for international sanctions was crucial to the international community’s ability to act.

As SACTU said at its 1963 Conference: “*To our friends abroad we say that trafficking in the fruits of apartheid can never be in the interests of the workers who suffer under apartheid.*” And the ANC stated repeatedly: “*What we in the ANC want to see is what the people of South Africa want to see.... We demand total isolation of the racist regime—no investment and withdrawal of existing investment.*”

The U.N. General Assembly echoed the call for international isolation of South Africa as early as 1962. But Western governments representing capitalist →

investment and trade with South Africa consistently blocked such a program.

There were, of course, other voices from within South Africa who did not endorse international sanctions. The regime and its allies made sure that those voices were heard. The racist authorities also made it more difficult for comrades operating openly in South Africa by threatening a five-year prison sentence for those persons endorsing the sanctions campaign.

In the case of Israeli apartheid, it will be very important to listen carefully to the voices of the Palestinians. Who are their legitimate representatives, given the external and internal limits of the Palestinian Authority? This is crucial, as there will no doubt be prominent Palestinians (perhaps even some trade union leaders) who will publicly oppose international sanctions. It will be difficult task for the international community to decide how best to support the collective interests of the Palestinian people in a context of divided voices. When such legitimate calls for sanctions are made – such as those coming from a vast number of Palestinian civil society and union organizations in the last year – they must be widely communicated with poten-

tial supporters the world over.

POLITICAL EDUCATION IN UNIONS

There is no short cut to effective political work, and the roots of that work begin with an educational program that systematically takes the fundamental message to friends (and foes) alike. The SACTU Solidarity Committee (Canada) contacted some 10,000 Canadian trade unionists per year at the peak of its work. This was done at union conventions, union schools and, most importantly, at local union meetings. Taking the political message to a local union meeting, with all the diversity of opinion found in any group of rank-and-file workers, must be the goal of any serious international solidarity campaign.

Design the educational programming to cover the basic points of information that defines the struggle, in this case the Israeli oppression of and dispossession of Palestinian rights. Use facts and figures, use maps, use important quotes from the oppressed and their leaders (and the oppressor and their leaders). Parallels and analogies with South African apartheid are obviously appropriate in this case. List

those unions and other organizations that have taken progressive positions, such as the resolution of CUPE-Ontario), and the actions that have been generated by those resolutions.

Develop a strategy that engages both national/regional union leaderships on the one hand with local union leaders and rank-and-file activists on the other. Get national union leaderships to endorse the work in writing and follow up on that letter with requests to address local union meetings and educationals. There is no other way to establish an informed solidarity but to invest long hours and countless meetings with small groups of workers and their families.

RESEARCH FOR CAMPAIGNS

Boycotts, divestment, and sanctions campaigns require extensive research on the many ties that bind the Canadian and Israeli political economies. Incorrect or incomplete information will guarantee campaigns that lack credibility. Put more positively, a research strategy that seeks to pinpoint foreign investment, trade, military complicity and other forms of Canadian state support, from Canadian government

Business Elites and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle

For those too young to have been involved in the anti-Apartheid struggle, there is probably an assumption that it was easier to fight the institutionalized racism of apartheid South Africa than Israeli apartheid now. It is suggested that South African apartheid was so obviously repugnant to the sensibilities of most of humanity, whereas the ethnic-cleansing and apartheid of Israel (the only 'democracy' in the region according to its defenders – words also often used for the old Pretoria regime as well) is not. However, we need to remember how much support apartheid South Africa received from the Canadian media, political and business elites in the early days of the struggle. Here is a verbatim text from a front-page article appearing in the *Globe and Mail* on April 21, 1964. The Weston family, of course, still remains an important part of the ruling elites in Canada, and Hilary Weston was not too long ago Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario.

"...Weston Firmly Backs Apartheid System"

W. Garfield Weston, chairman of the board of George Weston Ltd., of Toronto, yesterday gave a strong defense of South African Apartheid.

He was speaking at the company's annual meeting about his recent visit to that country on behalf of Associated British Foods Ltd. Mr. Weston is chairman of the board of the British company.

The policy of apartheid is much misunderstood, he said. Africans are treated and receive a better standard of free health care than is provided Canadians.

He added that it would be ridiculous and wrong to "try and force South Africa to give the vote to these millions of colored people, whose ethics are not ours, and whose Christian morals are completely absent."

(George C. Metcalf, the company's president and managing director, was one of three men given a human relations

international agencies like Canadian International Development Agency, the Export Development Corporation, and the Canadian embassy, is essential to the integrity and ultimate success of the campaign.

In the early 1980s, the SACTU Solidarity Committee (SSC) first documented Canadian foreign investment in South Africa and then turned its attention to the bilateral trade, including military collaboration in violation of the UN Sanctions against the arms trade with apartheid South Africa. The SSC obtained from Statistics Canada a more detailed report on the regular trade flows than would normally be published. This information was then the basis for an analysis of the two-way trade which appeared in a popular publication, *Trafficking in Apartheid: The Case for Canadian Sanctions Against Apartheid South Africa*. That booklet became the standard reference for virtually all trade-related sanctions issues in Canada. The same kind of publication on Canadian-Israeli trade is necessary and will prove invaluable for the current campaign.

The data collected by SSC was crucial to put the lie to pro-apartheid lobbyists who argued that trade sanctions would cause significant job losses in Canada. Our research demonstrated that some three hundred jobs or so might have been at risk, and that would be the case only if producers made no effort to find alternative markets for those Canadian exports. That was an unlikely scenario. Without the research data, it would have been a sterile and unproductive shouting match between pro- and anti-apartheid forces on the impact of sanctions on workers in Canada.

With the publicly-available data on Canada-South Africa economic relations in hand, the exciting challenge then became that of finding the actual companies and locations involved. Here is where organized workers became political actors as workplace researchers. Work routines are often boring. But they are less so if there is a chance to answer critical political questions: for example, is the pulp company that we work for one that is exporting pulp to South Africa (the second largest Canadian export to South Africa in the 1980s)? We were eventually successful in locating the

companies exporting the pulp to South Africa after both pulp and paper unions in B.C., despite organizational and political differences between them, agreed to tour SSC staff through every pulp town in the province in 1985.

Similarly, workers in other manufacturing settings found creative ways to check invoices and bills of lading to determine if there were South African connections. Dockworkers and marine workers in the Vancouver port were the most important 'worker-researchers' as they committed to regularly report the contents of ships plying to and from Canada and South Africa. Long before the days of personal computers, the data was forwarded to the SSC office in Toronto in a timely and predictable manner.

After years of conducting the educational sessions and trade research, a "*Week of Sanctions Actions Against South Africa*" was launched in 1986. The week saw many postal workers refuse to handle mail destined to or coming from South Africa; telephone operators refuse to place phone calls between Canada and South Africa; airline reservation agents refuse to facilitate ticketing for those violating the call to boycott personal travel to South Africa; and, most courageously, dockworkers refuse for up to four days to offload cargo from one of the Nedlloyd ships that had arrived in the Vancouver port. Despite threats of discipline and dismissals, not a single worker lost employment or wages as a result of these collective actions at the point of production. With the success of these actions, even the Mulroney Government was forced to slowly accede to the momentum for isolating the racist regime. But remember, that was almost a quarter of a century after the initial UN call for sanctions, boycotts and divestment campaigns.

It was not only the SACTU Committee that worked on the sanctions, divestment and boycott campaigns. Anti-apartheid organizations included most of the faith community and its Task Force on Churches and Corporate Responsibility, the Toronto Committee for the Liberation of Southern African (TCLSAC), Canadians Concerned about South Africa (CCSA), and many other non-governmental organi-

zations such as Oxfam-Canada, CUSO and many others. They carried out similar initiatives throughout Canadian civil society.

LESSONS LEARNED

Working to defeat apartheid South Africa was a necessary struggle, and a tremendous honour and experience to be part of it. Working to defeat Israeli apartheid for the national self-determination of the Palestinian peoples is no different

There will be moments of political highs as more and more organizations join the campaign and more and more individuals make personal commitments. But there will also be moments of political disappointments along the way. Prominent individuals who would be expected to be on side will occasionally not be there: perhaps rhetorically and sometimes not even that. An example from the past illustrates some of the dilemmas and issues. The call from the ANC and the international sanctions campaign was for an individual travel ban to South Africa as a further means of isolating the racist regime. But a few anti-apartheid activists self-defined themselves as the 'exception' and believed they knew more than the movement. Their travel to South Africa predictably confused the issues and the business media made much of it. It was necessary to voice the criticism and just keep doing the work. This will also be the case in the struggle to free Palestine, when even some union leaders are on the wrong side of the issue.

The commitment to systematic political work to defeat Israeli apartheid needs to be taken on with the same determination that defined the global anti-apartheid movement in the struggle for a non-racial democracy in South Africa. Freedom for the Palestinian people combined with social justice and peace in the region is the only real option. This is a key struggle for international solidarity activists in the Canadian trade union movement today. **R**

Ken Luckhardt is a long-time international solidarity activist and is recently-retired from the CAW national staff. From 1980-88, he chaired the SACTU Solidarity Committee, the official representative of SACTU in Canada at that time.



The Value of Free Speech

Isabel Macdonald

The trial of a PhD student who was beaten by police and arrested at a small peaceful demonstration in the Vari Hall Rotunda on Jan. 20, 2005, revealed new information implicating the York Administration in the beatings and arrests of students, further opening the York Administration up to potential legal challenges under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, according to Toronto lawyer Howard Morton.

The Toronto police officers who beat and arrested Greg Bird and several other students at the demonstration, which was organized by the Grassroots Anti-Imperialist Network (GRAIN) on the day of George W. Bush's reinauguration to highlight links between multi-national corporations that have ties with York and imperialist military interventions and occupations, testified in an Ontario court that they were privately contracted by York University to stop the protest, and were closely following instructions from York Security.

According to information obtained from the Toronto police department's finance office, York University paid the police officers a total of \$3,498.30 for their work in quelling the protest, which, according to video evidence presented in court, included beating students with clubs in the middle of the rotunda. According to the Toronto police finance office, York Security "Investigations Officer" Ken Tooby filed a request for six Toronto police officers (including one police sergeant) to come to York on a private "paid contract" with York University to provide "crowd control" for a "potential protest" on January 20, 2005. Police Constable (PC) Eric Reimer testified in an Ontario Court on May 7 that he had been alerted on Jan. 19, 2005 about the opportunity for a "paid duty" assignment at

York, for which he could "volunteer to do extra duties, paid by the private contractor" York University. (Such private police contracts are extremely routine at York; according to police financial records, already that very week, the administration had spent \$7,882.10 on police privately hired to provide "crowd control" on campus.)

When the police moved in to make the first arrest at the demonstration, they were following directions from York Security. As PC Steven Campoli stated, a "security officer who was working for York University told us that the protest was to stop." Reimer and York's five other privately contracted police arrived at York just before 12 pm, an hour before the demonstration was slated to begin, and were told by York Security agents that they should be "kept out of sight"... "in a room down the hall," according to Reimer. Reimer recounted that the six officers had been kept in that room, which was located just off of Ross Building's Central Square, by York Security for a full two hours before York Security agents asked the cops to "assist with the removal of this particular individual," who was allegedly in violation of the Trespass to Property Act.

In the background briefing that York Security agents gave the police, York Security failed to mention that that this individual happened to be a full-time student at York University's Osgoode Law School, and that virtually all of the protesters were York students who are entitled to be on campus. Reimer "was not aware of the student status of the persons;" in the briefing with York Security, "we were advised that there were several [Ontario Coalition Against Poverty] OCAP members present" (OCAP is a social justice organization whose protests



York University's administration paid police \$3,498 to shut down a peaceful protest

in Toronto have historically been subjected to mounted riot police).

According to Howard Morton, this private contract with the police potentially means that York could be held liable in future lawsuits. While privately contracted "paid duty" officers remain officers of the peace under the Criminal Code, the party who hires them "is always responsible for virtually everything, as long as they were carrying out the acts their employer asked them to do." Morton, who has worked on behalf of police as a crown attorney, and who has also represented people arrested at OCAP demonstrations, feels that the security agents' characterization of the demonstrators as "OCAP members" had aggravated the situation; in Morton's experience "there's a real dislike of OCAP by a lot of police officers." "I don't know if they consciously lied," Morton observed, but "all of the people charged were full-time students."

The York Administration has repeatedly refused to comment on the trial. York Security failed to return four telephone calls, and, at the time of publication, President Lorna Marsden had also failed, after a week and a half, to return the author's telephone call. York's Media Relations Director was apparently oblivious of the details, and, when asked about them, raised his voice and called the author's line of questioning "biased."

The revelations about the role of York University in hiring and directing the police officers who beat and arrested the students emerged at a May 8-10, 2006 Ontario court trial for Sociology PhD student Greg Bird, who was one of the seven people arrested in connection with the protest at York on Jan. 20, 2005 - and the only arrestee whose charges had not been diverted.

On June 28, 2006, the verdict of Bird's case was finally announced: he was found not guilty of the police's charge that he had allegedly tried to grab an officer's firearm. The Crown Attorney immediately confirmed that the Crown was not planning to appeal the decision.

For Bird, the trial merely reinforced the obvious: he was innocent and there had never been any evidence against him in the first place. "Each cop had vastly different accounts of the events, both from each other, and their own original tales," he recalls.

Over the two days of court proceedings, it did not take much for the tenuous strands of chewing gum holding together the police's story to unravel. The police officers had written their individual notes about the events of Jan. 20, 2005, which they filed as evidence in the court trial, after an informal debriefing session at the end of the day - a practice that aroused scathing criticisms from the judge, who pointed out that this led to inaccuracies in the individual officers' versions of events.

Upon questioning by his own lawyer - the brusque perma-frowning crown prosecutor Hugh Paisley—PC Steven Campoli, the officer who had been identified as the sole eye-witness to the alleged gun grab, immediately admitted on the first day of the trial that he had in fact not seen Bird grab the gun after all. "I can't be specific on what he touched," Campoli testified, backing away from his earlier written report.

With this single shred of what could have been evidence against Bird thus invalidated, the only pseudo-proof that the crown prosecutor could scrape up were vague sensory recollections from the mouth of PC Reimer, the officer who →

claimed that Bird had grabbed his firearm. However, Reimer's testimony sounded more like the material of a bad soft porn flick than evidence per se. The officer told the court that he believed that Bird had gone for his gun because Reimer had suddenly "felt a very familiar feeling," namely his police holster pressing into his own thigh. When the crown prosecutor asked for further sensory details from the cop ("How does your firearm hang"?), the court was subjected to further tangential details about Reimer's firearm, such as that it hangs "About half way down [his] thigh." Despite the plethora of phallus-evoking details that Reimer supplied the court in discussing his firearm, the officer admitted that he had not seen Bird attempting to grab the gun.

In contrast to the lacuna of evidence that Bird had assaulted any officers, the Toronto police's own video evidence – which the crown prosecutor showed no signs of having even watched beforehand but which he nonetheless stubbornly insisted on showing to the court through inept jabs at a VCR remote control – clearly depicted Bird being forcefully bashed over the head by Reimer's baton.

Despite the verdict in Bird's favour, the PhD student was far from pleased; he reflects that "there should not have been a trial," given the lacuna of evidence against him. Legal fees in preparation for the trial, for which CUPE 3903 bore the brunt of the cost – contributing \$35,000, while the YUFA chipped in \$5,000 – were expensive, and the costs in terms of students' time and emotional energies were also high. "If York had called off their hired militia, even after the 'arrests,' a lot of our time, cost and emotional exhaustion could have been better spent," Bird commented. He added that "A number of us 'arrested,' beaten up, and incarcerated students have left York as a result of this incident."

The seriousness of the attempt to disarm an officer charge, which represents a serious offense under the Criminal Code, also cost the student victims of the police brutality an avenue to obtain legal recognition that their basic civil rights had been violated on January 20, 2005. Lawyers Morton and Tamara Duncan had been mounting a legal challenge under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that Morton says had a fair chance of success. "When I started to look at it, the big issue for the charter was whether registered students could be


arrested," Morton stated. The strength of the case that the students' charter rights had been violated was such that the crown attorney had felt compelled to agree to divert the charges that the six other arrestees from January 20 were facing (which included charges of obstructing police and assaulting police). Morton recollects that "Hugh [Paisley] thought, oh my god, we're gonna have a big charter issue, and we might lose it!"

As a result of the deal struck between the students' lawyers and the crown, the charter issues, which would directly implicate the university administration in the student beatings and arrests, have not been addressed in court, at least not yet.

Asked about whether he and the other students arrested on January 20, 2005 plan to seek legal recourse, Bird is still unsure. However, he was very clear that "the cops, and their employer that day [York University], fucked up." In the aftermath of the arrests, the York Administration issued statements publicly slandering the students by reiterating the police's unproven and groundless charges against them as if they were fact. Moreover, the York Administration provided the police with the on-campus "back-room," in which third year Political Science student, Nick Birtig, was so severely beaten that he had to be hospitalized; according to witnesses, police officers repeatedly kicked Birtig in the face, while chanting "cock-sucker" behind the closed doors of this room. Bird stated that "It alarms me that the Marsden Administration has not taken any responsibility for the events on January 20, 2005. They released misleading information about the events, called in the police one-week in advance, and gave the police a hideaway spot on our campus, which was subsequently used as a hidden space to brutally beat up 'their' so-called student body."

In short, the practices of the Marsden Administration are completely at odds with the supreme law of Canada enshrined in the Canadian Charter, according to Morton. Morton commented that "Marsden's approach to free speech...is so fundamentally warped...If you dare to exercise your charter rights, she's gonna call in the cops." **R**

Isabel Macdonald is a doctoral candidate in Communication and Culture. This article first appeared in the October issue of *Critical Times*.

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The Knowledge-Based Society and the Crisis of Higher Education

Eric Newstadt

In an article about the making of a derivatives market, American sociologists Donald MacKenzie and Yuval Millo describe how the tendency of people to behave in predictable and economically “rational” ways has been the product of conditioning, of discipline, of a certain kind of education. It is a parable of “homo-economicus”, a telling description of how we have come to hold closely to ideas and beliefs that obtain, at best, only figments of truth, and then for only small segments of our society. Education is, it would seem, not a panacea. And this is what progressive social forces need to bear in mind when contemplating our response not just to the massive array of new governmental initiatives – taken at all levels of government – to “improve” higher education in Canada, but also when deciding who it is our bedfellows will be when we organize that response.

THE ONTARIO EXAMPLE

As a case in point, we can look at Ontario. About 16 months ago, after over a decade of funding cuts, the Government of Ontario introduced its “Reaching Higher” plan for higher education. The plan, which followed closely on the heels of Bob Rae’s much vaunted media relations exercise come “consultation” around higher education, dedicated fully \$6.2 billion dollars in new monies for Ontario’s post-secondary institutions. While the \$6.2 billion has been a welcome injection to Ontario’s increasingly over-crowded and crumbling universities and colleges, it holds little promise of generating any meaningful returns, at least for most Ontarians. Significantly, Ontario’s new plan is similar in form and content to efforts being undertaken both throughout Canada and around the world to restructure systems of higher education so as to give national economies a leg-up in the competitive race that is said to be the emerging glo-

bal and knowledge based economy.

The logic here is rather simple and deceptively benign: as our economy becomes increasingly dependent on “conceptual outputs”, on the production of “ideas” and not “things”, it is vital that our workforce become more highly skilled; as we add more and more to the cadre of knowledge workers upon which industry and corporations can draw, we are in a better position to reap the rewards available in the knowledge based economy. And so it was that Ontario’s Liberal government has sought to ‘reach higher.’

But the \$6.2 billion, which is to be delivered over 6 years, doesn’t really equate to very much at all, not for a system that has been starved of resources for well-over a decade and which is also presently being pressed to grow. In fact, after every single dollar of the \$6.2 billion committed hits the system, total public per student expenditure will, in Ontario, barely at the national average. And if this isn’t telling of the real intent and design of ‘Reaching Higher’, of governmental efforts the world over to restructure systems of higher education, some of the details in such plans are even more indicative of what’s really going on.

In addition to the \$6.2 billion, ‘Reaching Higher’ has also involved the creation of the new Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). HEQCO will be charged with general oversight of Ontario’s post-secondary institutions, with ensuring that the people’s money is well-spent, that called for enrolment growth at both the undergraduate and graduate levels doesn’t undermine quality. This is why enrollment growth in Ontario is being handled via “Multi-year Accountability Agreements (MYA’s)”, essentially quasi contracts between individual universities and the government around capacity and enrolment growth projections; through the Council of Ontario Universities, and in negotiation with individual departments, University

administrations set, at the beginning of each year, enrollment targets for the following year.

Based on those projections, the government in turn delivers two envelopes of funding, though only during the year after an MYA is signed, when growth has already happened. The first envelope comes roughly a year after an MYA is signed, right at the beginning of the school year, thereby allowing University administrations to start – only start – hiring the faculty needed to handle the complement of students that have already started school. Universities can begin to finish the hiring process when the second envelope of funding is delivered, roughly half-way through the school year, when enrolment numbers normally solidify and universities can show definitively the extent to which they’ve been able to meet the previous year’s projections. In other words, enrolment is effectively set to increase well before any resources to handle that growth are delivered. Unless and until enrolment numbers stabilize, faculty to student ratios will grow just as fast as enrolment. It’s no wonder then that many within the field of higher education are beginning to say that the government’s approach is generally wrongheaded, or so it would seem.

The government also is seeking to ensure that growth doesn’t undermine quality. Re-enter HEQCO, this time with a set of “key performance indicators” (KPI’s), essentially a series of measures designed to document and measure quality. Though HEQCO hasn’t announced any definitive set of KPI’s, and in fact just recently closed a call for submissions from stakeholders on how quality should be measured, we do have some fairly good indications of what those measures will be. First, we can expect to see a series of measures which have become increasingly ubiquitous in higher education, in large part due to the on-going efforts of the Organization for Economic Cooperation →

and Development (OECD) to universalize particular forms of measurement: measures of through-put and post-graduate earnings, which are otherwise referred to as Rate of Return analyses. In other words, universities are doing a good job if they enroll and graduate large numbers of students and if those students go on to realize a large enough personal financial benefit for their education. At the graduate level, KPI's are expected to measure attrition rates and times to completion averages in addition to those just mentioned. Other indications are that the government will measure quality by tracking how many students and teachers at each of the province's universities are winning awards or external sources of funding, or how effective individual faculty are in concluding joint university-industry research contracts, and the frequency with which scholarly work is cited.

FAILING MEASURES OF RESEARCH AND QUALITY

Unfortunately, not a single of these measures really speaks meaningfully to quality.

Putting aside the issues of through-put and rates of return for a moment, it is interesting to consider that increasingly, awards and external funding grants go only to scholars whose work organizations like the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council classifies as "useful." And in the natural sciences, basic and curiosity driven research is being driven underground as awards and funding programs are re-tooled to favour industry-partnered and commercializable forms of research. Indeed, everywhere one turns "usability" defined as a research deliverable that can be privatized, commodified, and sold at monopoly rents, is that which is winning awards. And there is good reason to suspect the quality of this research.

York University's Joel Lexchin, for instance, in conducting a meta-study of the results generated by research funded by pharmaceutical firms relative to those conducted with other sources of finance, found that "studies sponsored by pharmaceutical companies were more likely to have outcomes favouring the sponsor than were studies with other sponsors."

And the Canadian Federation of Students is now helping to wage a campaign of support for one academic whose work was allegedly stolen and manipulated by award winning researchers at the University of Toronto. Worse still, there is evidence to suggest that those same researchers manipulated the results of a water study they conducted in Warton, Ontario, the very project for which they earned said award. If true, there is reason to believe that their experiment wasn't just dishonest and of poor quality, it also posed a significant risk to public health.

The frequency with which certain works are cited is also problematic as an indicator of quality. First, there simply is not a strict correlation between the quality of a faculty and the quality of the student population that they teach, particularly at "research intensive" universities where faculty-to-student ratios are high and face-time is limited. Second, the frequency with which a source is cited says nothing about its apparent quality. By way of example, President Bush recently made reference to Samuel Huntington's infamous, impoverished, and nonetheless much cited work, *The Clash of Civilizations*. Third, in an environment where "good" research increasingly means "commercializable" research, KPI's based on citations might radically understate the "quality" of sound, critically minded, and curiosity driven work. In fact, many citation indexes favour certain, more mainstream and less critical publications. In other words, a faculty might score high on an index precisely because it doesn't produce critical scholarship. Finally, in subjects like English, where expert scholars might take years to write novels, not lengthy analyses of Shakespeare, the frequency of citations tells us almost nothing.

As for through-put and rates of return, behind them lurks a sordid tale of manipulation, obfuscation, and illiteracy, one that gets at the very heart of the government's real agenda, and of the complicity of University administrations in it. Quite obviously the only thing of which through-put is a measure is through-put – there is simply no reason to assume, particularly in a measure designed to ensure quality – that more is better. Of course, through-put is

generally a conjunctive measure, one viewed in relation to post-graduation earnings as well as student and job satisfaction data. And while this would seem a more reasonable proposition, this is only the case so long as we conceive of education as nothing more than a lengthy job-training process.

According to data published by Human Resources and Services Development Canada, only 42.42% of so-called knowledge workers can read or write at a high level of literacy. And while that number increases markedly when one considers the number of university and college graduates that are classified as knowledge workers, (around 80% of university/college grads who are knowledge workers can read or write at a high level of proficiency), it is mystifying that the number is anything shy of 100%.

In fact, we need to be wondering why it is that so many graduates, regardless of the occupational categories into which they are later deposited, can't read and write at the very highest level. And it's important too to keep in mind that what HRSDC and the OECD consider high levels of literacy aren't really very high. In fact level 4 and 5 on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), which is the standard measure of literacy used around the world, indicates nothing about a person's ability to deal with abstract theories and concepts, critical ideas and the like.

By way of example, one of the more difficult questions on the IALS, requires that survey respondents read from a chart the total number of grams of fat contained in a Big Mac, and then to multiply that number by a given quantity in order to determine how many of the 500 calories contained in the sandwich are derived from fat. In other words, the respondent is given the formula: "1g of fat = 9 calories" and then asked to find on an associated chart how many grams of fat, 26, is contained in a Big Mac. An ability to use the given formula to determine the number of calories derived from fat is said to demonstrate the highest level of literacy on the IALS.

What this means is that rhetoric about the knowledge-based economy is a load of bunk, that what people earn – and the incomes of "knowledge workers" do tend

to skew above average – is nowhere near a good indication of how they think, of the quality of their education. And this is precisely the point: the design and function of our system of higher education, understood provincially, nationally, globally, isn't at all about quality, it's about the market. And the market stands to benefit tremendously from a highly trained but poorly educated electorate come flexible workforce, that is adept at reading and following directions, but not at questioning their efficacy, their morality. This is of course the great secret of higher education, why it was hardly noticed that 45% of high-school graduates in Toronto last year graduated with an A-average or better, why no one ever talks about the fact that approximately 25% of university and college graduates can't do better than score at level 3 on the IALS.

FAILING UNIVERSITY & GOVERNMENT POLICY

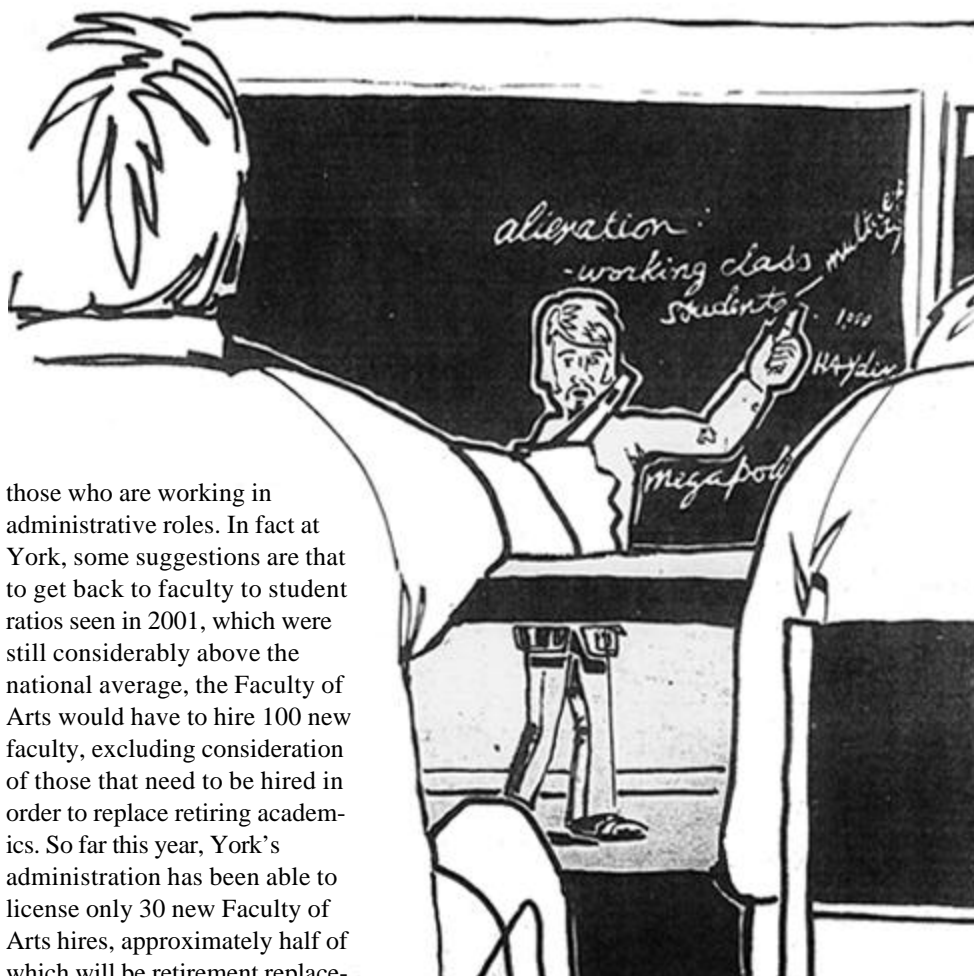
Here's the rub: graduate schools and faculty everywhere are increasingly staffed by the products of our system of higher education. No wonder that positivistic social scientism and commercial research agendas are enjoying a rather happy time these days. No wonder too that "critical thinking skills" are increasingly described as something akin to a person's ability to problem-solve; as the quality of higher education is thinned, "critical thinking" will increasingly become an unintended euphemism for an ability to practice convention really well.

And so it shouldn't come as a surprise that university administrations across Ontario aren't more than a little concerned about the way in which they're being asked to grow, that is long before the resources necessary to meet the demands of that growth arrive. Even the practitioners of convention recognize that training is easier when faculty to student ratios are not quite as high as they now are at places like York University where there is only a single tenure-stream faculty member for every 36 undergraduate students. At the graduate level the numbers appear less appalling, though only because they aren't broken down by department and don't consider faculty on leave, those on sabbatical, or

those who are working in administrative roles. In fact at York, some suggestions are that to get back to faculty to student ratios seen in 2001, which were still considerably above the national average, the Faculty of Arts would have to hire 100 new faculty, excluding consideration of those that need to be hired in order to replace retiring academics. So far this year, York's administration has been able to license only 30 new Faculty of Arts hires, approximately half of which will be retirement replacements. Just 85 to go... this year.

Telling here is the fact that upset over the situation hasn't yet translated into any kind of visible action. As York's Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies put it during a recent Council meeting, "the carrot for growing is more money, the stick for not growing isn't less money, it is potentially no money." And so through backdoor channels, behind closed doors, in and around the Council of Ontario Universities, university administrations are talking with government officials about changing the status quo, about making more funding available more quickly and on the front end of enrolment growth. Good thing, right? Potentially.

To be sure, the way resources presently get delivered to universities has to change. But there are several ways to skin a cat here and so long as the discourse around higher education continues, both at the University and at the governmental



level, to be about the so-called, "knowledge based economy" its unlikely that we'll get very far, even if we do see lower faculty to student ratios, in building a high-quality system of higher education. Indeed, we have at least to pause and consider whether growing programs within an increasingly commercialized and market-based environment will do more harm than good. With corporations on the dole, and with the welfare trough nestled firmly on University campuses, quality will remain a phantom. But then no critical mind ever conceived of training as human salvation. That was always the job of a good education. **R**

Eric Newstadt is active in the student movement and studying at York University.

Oaxaca

The Popular Uprising Escalates

Rogelio Cuevas Fuentes & Lindsay Windhager

Oaxaca, Mexico is currently the site of a radical popular uprising aimed at ousting the corrupt, repressive and illegitimate regime of Oaxacan Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. This remarkable movement signifies a profound transformation in Oaxacan politics and political consciousness that could culminate in the emergence of real alternative political models in Oaxaca. Moreover, the Oaxacan struggle will undoubtedly serve as an example for other impoverished states dealing with dictatorial and corrupt governing bodies; particularly on the heels of fraudulent presidential elections that have deepened existing cleavages in the country.

The movement emerged in response to violent and repressive tactics that were utilized to suppress striking teachers affiliated with the National Education Workers Union – Section 22 (SNTE) on June 14, 2006. In Mexico, the SNTE 22 is known for its militancy and its commitment to social change. The teachers had been on strike since May 22, 2006. Their list of demands included legal recognition of Radio Plantón, an unlicensed community radio that serves as an important medium of communication for social activists and movements, improvements to educational infrastructure (construction of classrooms, laboratories and workshops; free student breakfasts; uniforms and more funding for scholarships and staff hiring) and salary increases. Ulises' June 14 police raid was met with outrage and the 3,000 deployed police officers were driven out of the city centre by the teachers. The following day, thousands of people marched through the streets demanding that Governor Ruiz Ortiz step down. The number of deaths, disappeared, injured and detained is still unclear but it is believed that between six and nine people were killed and a woman miscarried. Moreover, installations of the Radio Plantón were destroyed and the SNTE 22 office building was vandalized.

The massive uprising now underway is a result not only of the abhorrent tactics employed on June 14 but in response to years of oppression, exploitation and injustice. Oaxaca is one of the three poorest states in the country and has the highest percentage of

indigenous people of any state in Mexico. Its teachers are among the poorest paid. The state boasts sixteen different indigenous communities speaking a variety of dialects and maintaining distinct traditions and cultures. Over the last several decades, Mexican economic development policies have further entrenched Oaxacan communities in a cycle of bare subsistence and poverty. "Under pressure from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and conditions placed on U.S. bank loans and bailouts, the government has encouraged foreign investment, while cutting expenditures intended to raise rural incomes. Prices have risen dramatically since the government cut subsidies for necessities like gasoline, electricity, bus fares, tortillas, and milk." In recent decades, Oaxaca has also seen a growth in foreign ownership of companies and businesses signifying the dismantling of unions and the further concentration of wealth and property in the hands of a few.

Furthermore, Oaxaca is home to ongoing electoral fraud, by which means Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz was elected. He represents the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), which maintained a dictatorship in Mexico for more than 70 years at the federal level. Although the presidency is now held by the PAN, the PRI maintains a stronghold in Oaxaca and continues its legacy of corruption, neoliberal economic policies and overt political repression. Political leaders silence Oaxacan protest and dissent through violent and repressive tactics, illegal arrests as well as politically motivated disappearances, torture and imprisonment.

The horrific events of June 14th coupled with decades of economic and political injustices provoked the Oaxacan people to respond to the state with demands for an alternative governing structure and the ousting of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. On June 17th, the People's Popular Assembly of Oaxaca (APPO) was born as a mechanism through which to work towards these ends. The APPO is an association of diverse organizations and individuals including unions, student groups, NGOs, human rights groups



and indigenous communities and groups dedicated to the ousting of Ruiz Ortiz, to community-based action, popular decision making and an alternative economic and political model. “[The APPO] is born in response to authoritarianism, to state terrorism, to fascism, it is born with the hope of a new world and future of equality, without the exploited and exploiters.”

The political actions of the APPO have escalated in numbers and scale. These actions include the occupation of state-owned radio stations and television stations, sit-ins, mega-marches of close to a million people and road blockades. Indeed, people from all over Mexico and abroad have been able to show solidarity with this movement through the utilization of the radio. Most recently, the APPO and its supporters marched from Oaxaca City to Mexico City. On October 9th, they arrived at the Zócalo in Mexico City where they set up an encampment outside the Senate buildings. The large group of marchers was met in many towns and communities with incredible support and solidarity. In Tepetlixpa Cuautla in the state of Morelos, the caravan was hit by a terrible rainstorm. The marchers set up camp but were soaked and cold. This town mobilized itself and organized sleeping arrangements for all of the marchers and provided them with clothes, food and food for the trip ahead. In Nezahualcoyotl, in the state of Mexico, the caravan received an incredibly warm reception. In Neza, the municipal president is Oaxacan as are many of the residents who sympathize with the unacceptable state violence and injustice characteristic of Oaxaca. Supporters such as those encountered by the protesters in Neza and Tepetlixpa Cuautla signify the ways in which other Mexicans now see political struggle as exemplified by Oaxaca as achievable.

However, as the movement becomes more and more powerful, state and business interests are taking measures to implement repressive and violent tactics in order to regain control of the state. Ruiz Ortiz has been accused on several occasions of an inability to govern Oaxaca as the state has been essentially paralyzed by

the political actions of the APPO. Under pressure to resolve this crisis before Calderón, illegitimate winner of the 2006 presidential elections, assumes power in December, Ruiz Ortiz has resorted to clandestine tactics and a systematic violation of human rights in order to dismantle the movement. Since June, numerous disappearances have been reported as well as gunfire and brutal beatings at sit-ins and marches, harassment, destruction of property, illegal detention and torture of participants and the murder of many APPO organizers and supporters including children.

At the beginning of October, both marines and army troops were deployed to the city of Oaxaca and surrounding areas and repression seemed imminent. However, apart from ongoing repressive tactics carried out by plainclothes police and army personnel, a large-scale repression has not yet occurred. In response to accusations that Ruiz Ortiz has lost control of Oaxaca and at the request of the APPO and SNTE 22, the Senate, on October 13th, sent Senators to assess the crisis of Oaxaca and the level of unrest. A decision has not yet been made on this assessment as to whether or not Ulises Ruiz Ortiz will be requested to step down. This decision is expected as early as Tuesday, October 17, 2006.

At the same time, the federal government has engaged in a dialogue with representatives of the SNTE 22 and APPO regarding an end to the strike and a return to work. The government offered a tantalizing economic package to the teachers, who in normal times receive poverty wages and are not suffering special hardship as a result of the suspension of their income since August. This package would provide back pay to all teachers who have been living without any income for several months. The offer expires as of October 16, 2006, at which time all teachers have been requested to return to work. If not, the Secretary of State Carlos Abascal Carranza has threatened that the use of public forces may be the only remaining option. Sub-secretary of Government, Arturo Chavez, has also stated that if an agreement cannot be reached, this will undoubtedly allow for consideration →



of “other kinds of actions.” Indeed, federal actors including Chavez and Carranza have confirmed that they feel confident about the steps they have taken in order to resolve the conflict peacefully and that they do not view the use of public forces as a failure of negotiations but rather as a part of politics.

As of October 9, 2006, Oaxacan state forces have been managed by the federal government in a so-called effort to ensure public safety and the re-establishment of security for Oaxacan people. However, on October 12, violence erupted once again in Oaxaca. Plainclothes police officers opened fire on a group of 120 teachers and members of the APPO in downtown Oaxaca. Four participants were injured. Ironically, the Sub-Commission of the Senate set to determine governability in Oaxaca was present in Oaxaca on the 12th. Moreover, on October 14th, military personnel dressed in plainclothes opened fire and killed Alejandro Garcia Hernandez at one of the barricades. Garcia Hernandez was shot twice in the head. Abascal and other government officials claim that such attacks are the work of “violent groups” but it appears rather likely that this explanation is merely an effort to assume impunity as is customary. As a result of this political violence, teachers decided to cancel the State Assembly and consultations that had been scheduled to discuss the proposal of the Secretary of State until after the decision of the Senate or the removal of Ruiz Ortiz.

At the same time, the APPO continues to escalate its political action in response to repression and the unwillingness of Ruiz Ortiz to step down. The APPO has announced the commencement of a hunger strike that will continue until Ruiz Ortiz resigns. Members of the APPO and SNTE 22 have formed and re-enforced new security areas in Mexico City in key strategic locations including President Fox’s residency and federal government buildings. The APPO has also stated that they are planning a megamarch and a national protest based out of Mexico City slated for October 21st in solidarity with the Oaxacan struggle. Moreover, student groups, social groups and supporters of the SNTE and APPO are working tirelessly in Mexico City to disseminate information about the struggle and to coordinate solidarity actions on

a national scale. In spite of violent state repression, the Oaxacan movement is transforming into a national struggle with international support and recognition.

As for the disappeared, imprisoned, tortured, murdered and injured members and supporters of the APPO and SNTE 22, there has been little mention of justice and even less recognition of the atrocities that have been committed by the Mexican state. The fight for recognition of these individuals and their sacrifices will be ongoing but it is certain that the Oaxacan people are committed to achieving justice through their struggle. Indeed, this process has already commenced. On October 13th, a group of Oaxacan lawyers presented evidence of state repression that occurred on June 14th to the Superior Tribunal of Justice. The outcome of this exhibition of evidence is not yet known but it signifies the ongoing strength and commitment of Oaxacans to the justice and dignity of those that have been harmed in the struggle for change.

Regardless of how things unfold in the coming weeks, the Oaxacan uprising has been an extraordinary success. In addition to state violence and repression, this movement has overcome and continues to work to overcome many challenges including a lack of resources, dissemination of misinformation at state and national levels by the Mexican government and bourgeoisie and the unification of diverse communities traditionally divided along lines of class, culture, ideology, language, education and geography. The Oaxacan struggle has created momentum for long-term political change in Oaxaca. Moreover, this movement has cultivated a new and strengthened social fabric that is unified in political consciousness and commitment to social change. Oaxaca will undoubtedly serve as an example of popular and democratic resistance in Mexico in spite of extreme efforts to dismember the movement by state force. **R**

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Mexico’s Class Struggle for Democracy

Ian MacDonald

Mexico has been rocked by powerful revolts against neoliberalism throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century. Until now, none has succeeded in building a broad political movement that could contest power at the national level. The armed insurrections in the countryside, the rank and file rebellions in the trade unions, the struggles for indigenous rights, the anti-privatization and student strikes – each

reached a plateau, gained either minimal or meaningless concessions from the state, and subsided.

Mexico’s left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) has been incapable of nurturing these struggles. Since swallowing the fraud that robbed it of victory in the 1988 presidential elections, the PRD has followed the contradictory course of most social democratic parties in the cur-

rent period – towards an acceptance of the neoliberal *dictat* while attempting to present policy alternatives to its electoral base in the working class. The result has been a steady erosion of internal party life and of working class electoral participation. A large share of the PRD vote is either in support of particular respected candidates or is a consequence of *faute de mieux*.

If the current presidential candidate of the PRD Andrés Manuel López Obrador had been allowed to win the July 2nd 2006 elections, this scenario would likely have changed only marginally. As mayor of Mexico City, López Obrador practiced a neoliberalism-from-below while retaining his left base and a popularity rating that never dipped below 60 percent. During the presidential elections, he performed the delicate act of running a center-left campaign domestically while assuring the international press and markets that his “alternative nation building project” did not entail a departure from neoliberal orthodoxy. He picked up the qualified endorsement of the London *Economist*, and sympathetic coverage in the *Financial Times* and the *Washington Post*. If there was a political leader in Mexico this past June who seemed to hold the promise of ruling the country effectively while ensuring neoliberal continuity, it was López Obrador.

The Mexican ruling class thought differently. It looks on López Obrador and his base in the working class and peasantry with a fear and hatred that recalls the reaction of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie to the rise of Hugo Chávez. Through its clumsy political interventions, it has now definitively closed the possibility of stable neoliberal rule in Mexico. Open attempts by the right and the country’s largest corporations to destroy Obrador politically during the year leading up to the elections, to disqualify him from running, to smear him mercilessly in illegally purchased television ads, and ultimately – as almost half the country believes – to defraud him of electoral victory, have changed everything.

MEXICO IN MOTION

Mexico is now living through a major political upheaval with a social inflection: for effective suffrage and against neoliberalism. Organizers say that the country has not seen a movement on this scale since the nationalization of the petroleum industry in 1938. It is broader and more promising than the student-led democracy movement of 1968.

There are two dynamics to the radicalization: political and social. In the eight weeks between early July and early September, the political crisis developed

rapidly from a contest for constitutional legitimacy to the struggle over constitutional legality. Socially, all PRD election talk of “macroeconomic stability” is gone, replaced by condemnations of neoliberalism and promises of a new democratic state.

The decisive shift from the first phase of the political crisis to the second was the failure of the country’s highest electoral tribunal on August 28th to call for a full recount of the votes. In the first count, Felipe Calderón of the rightwing Party of National Action (PAN) came out ahead by 244,000 votes, a margin of .58 percent or less than 2 votes per polling station. Obrador and the PRD noted many irregularities in the electoral process. An abnormally large number of votes were nullified. Citizen scrutineers were replaced at the last moment by operatives loyal to a labour leader close to the PAN. Many urns contained more votes than voters, others far too few. Stashes of PRD votes started showing up in garbage dumps. Obrador demanded a full recount, and a mass movement took to the streets with the slogan “vote by vote, polling station by polling station.” But the country’s electoral tribunal ruled for a partial recount of 9 percent of the votes and on the 28th found that although this recount required the disqualification of over 230,000 ballots due to what it called “arithmetical errors,” the difference between the two candidates would remain virtually unchanged. The movement’s demands were rejected and the path opened for Calderón to be declared president.

This resolved nothing. Instead of lending its legitimacy to the vote, the illegitimacy of the vote tainted the tribunal. The decision effectively closed the space for negotiations through constitutional means and discredited one more institution in the eyes of millions of Mexicans. Obrador and the movement rejected the legality of both the decision and the tribunal, and finally the constitutionality of the government itself. Obrador called for a National Democratic Convention to be held on September 16th to decide the future of the resistance movement and, beyond that, for a Constitutional Assembly to refound the Republic.

The political crisis would not have developed this rapidly if not for the social crisis produced by neoliberalism. When

participants in the massive assemblies and demonstrations are asked why they take part, they invariably mention both electoral fraud and the criminal distribution of the country’s wealth. Mexico has the 4th largest number of billionaires in the world while fully half of the working class earns the equivalent of twice the minimum wage or less – a miserable sum.

In taking the campaign for a recount to the streets, Obrador opened the door to all of the social movements that have emerged to challenge neoliberalism. In the early days of the recount mobilizations, after the protests reached the two million mark, a decision was made to occupy the Zócalo and Paseo de la Reforma – the main thoroughfare along which are located many of the city’s luxury hotels and corporate headquarters. For 49 days, encampments stretched 7 miles and included living, meeting and concert spaces, communal kitchens and recreational areas for the daily use of protesters from out of state as well as the outlying districts of the vast metropolis. On weekends and evenings especially, the encampments became mass forums for discussing all aspects of Mexican politics.

The decision to occupy the center of Mexico City lost Obrador any remaining establishment support and many centrist voters. Except for the leftwing *La Jornada* and political magazine *Proceso*, the national media alternatively attacked and ignored him. In August it was possible to find demands for state repression even in liberal newspapers. After one last op ed was given him in the *New York Times* to plead his case for electoral transparency, the international press called on Obrador to fold his tent and return to parliamentary politics. If the twinning of democracy with free markets is the global ideology of our times, it is no surprise which comes first among the opinion makers.

Obrador was pushed left. The Mexican Chávez which had hitherto existed only in the imagination of the country’s ruling class was taking form. By early August, Obrador was slamming Mexico’s rich for fleecing the country, vowing to break neoliberalism and, later that month, to create a “cradle-to-grave” welfare state paid for by a redistribution of the country’s wealth. What he now called the “simulated republic” must be supplanted by →

a “true social and democratic state.”

This combination of demands for democracy and against neoliberalism is very powerful. During one of the mass “informative assemblies” held nearly every day in the Zócalo, a young man in the crowd turned to me and said, referring to the people assembled in the square, “what you see here is total non-conformity with what is happening in this country.”

THE EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER

The tension continued to build in early September towards a climax on the 16th. Speculation that the parliamentary wing of the PRD would soon break with Obrador was dispelled on September 1st, when PRD representatives occupied the house’s podium to prevent President Vicente Fox from giving his annual address to the nation.

Police forces under the authority of the federal executive shut down eleven subway stations and a large working class section of the city surrounding the Congress, expecting that it would be the movement which would attempt to prevent the address. According to the current mayor, this was the largest police operation in the city’s history and violated sections of the country’s constitution, including most seriously, the autonomy of Congress. The operation cost 13 million dollars and comprised 40 armoured vehicles, attack dogs, sharpshooters on rooftops, a two-meter-high metal fence, and over 8,000 riot police in all, including half of the Federal Preventative Police (PFP) – the force currently being investigated for torture and rape in their May attack on a peasant indigenous movement in the nearby town of San Salvador Atenco.

In the Zócalo, Obrador presented his argument that the state would use any confrontation to justify repression of the movement, and counseled that protesters remain in the square. The important thing was to continue building for the convention on the 16th and not fall for provocations. The question was put to the assembly, which agreed by consensus. Almost no one marched to where the PFP stood waiting, all dressed up and no one to repress. It was a remarkable display of a serious, disciplined movement thinking strategically on its feet.



Back in the encampments, thousands gathered around television sets tuned in to the events in Congress. When Fox was forced to retreat a mere 7 minutes after arriving (he didn’t make it past the cloakroom), they erupted in jubilation and returned to the Zócalo to celebrate what they considered to be their first victory. By its actions, the PRD went some way to re-establish its credibility with the movement. Obrador demonstrated his ability both to keep the parliamentary party onside, and, once again, to wrong-foot Fox. That night new slogans emerged from the encampments as people’s confidence surged: “Now we want more”, “Fox has fallen, Felipe will fall”, “Not one step backwards.”

As was expected, the electoral tribunal officially declared Calderón winner of the elections on September 5th. It ruled days later that the electoral process had been compromised in several respects but that the outcome could nevertheless be considered valid. Calderón “the usurper” will assume power on December 1st as the weakest occupant of the Presidency in recent memory.

On September 16th, over a million participants from across the country met in Mexico City to convene the National Democratic Convention. The encampments had been taken down the day before to allow the army to march through the streets of downtown as it customarily does on the 16th to celebrate national independence.

This decision should be seen in light of Obrador’s consistent appeals to the army not to intervene in the crisis, his efforts to avoid a confrontation with the forces of order which everyone knows the movement cannot win. The arguments in favour of the motion were put to the assembly in the Zócalo, which assented by a show of hands.

POST-CONVENTION PROSPECTS

The army marched in the morning and the convention met in the afternoon. The central question was whether to name Obrador “legitimate president of Mexico” or “leader of the peaceful civic resistance.” PRD party leaders, including the left and social movement representatives, favoured the latter – a position from which negotiations would be possible. There was no doubt that the movement favoured the former option, greeting Obrador at every opportunity with “Presidente! Presidente!” The convention recognized Obrador as “legitimate President”, rejected the usurper’s claim to power, and endorsed a decision to form a rebel government with a shadow cabinet and a series of commissions to work on specific issues. This rebel government will be based in Mexico City but will also have an itinerant character, travelling across the country to build local bases of support. The encampments have been lifted, but Obrador has been put in a posi-

tion from which it will be difficult to retreat.

It is not immediately clear how much political authority Obrador's government will be able to exert. Even PRD-controlled states and left unions will have to recognize, if only implicitly, the state power which controls the apparatus of government, dispenses federal funding and mediates conflict. This is not a situation of dual power; though weakened, the Mexican state is very much intact. However, the formation of an alternative government does promise to address specific weaknesses in the movement as it prepares for a long struggle. Most importantly, it provides the direction and structure required to generalize resistance at the national level. As of now, the movement is regionally uneven, concentrated in Mexico City, and has not effectively linked up with other struggles across the country. The PRD will be unable to carry this movement forward, while the kind of left party required to bring geographically dispersed and socially disarticulated struggles together simply does not exist. On November 3rd, the rebel government will take shape as Obrador names his cabinet. It will "take power" on November 20th, a date which resonates strongly in the country's revolutionary tradition. Under the slogan "Effective Suffrage, No to Re-election," Francisco I. Madero called the nation to arms on that day in November after the fraudulent elections of 1910.

In the weeks following the convention, Obrador campaigned full-time in support of his party's candidate in the October 15th Tabasco state elections. Tabasco is Obrador's home state, a PRD stronghold, and went in his favour in July's federal election. According to the official results, the PRD has lost the Tabasco vote by a significant margin. The vote is being interpreted as a referendum on Obrador's politics by those who hope that this signals the end of the post-election crisis. More damaging than the vote itself, however, is the fact that the movement was left in limbo for 20 days as Obrador withdrew from the national stage to campaign locally. This has given Calderón crucial breathing room through Obrador's failure to build on the momentum from the convention. A true test of the movement's strength will come in the early weeks of November, when Obrador will tour the south and centre of the coun-

try, and on the 20th in Mexico City.

If Obrador's parallel government is in question, Calderón's administration is facing six years of what in Mexico is referred to as "ingobernabilidad" – the inability to rule legitimately. Quite apart from the fraud that was committed, the PAN enjoys little support in the south or in the capital. Congress is virtually deadlocked, even if the PRI and PAN (or "PRIAN" as it sometimes seems) control a majority of seats. Privatization of the oil and electricity sectors – the next step in the neoliberal agenda – now appears an unlikely prospect. Calderón himself has unveiled a plan to eliminate poverty, reduce inequality, and raise per capita income to \$30,000 USD by the year 2030. (See: "Mexico's President-elect lays out reform plans, public consultations," *International Herald Tribune*, October 10, 2006.) Even if this project could be taken seriously, it is doubtful whether Mexican capitalism has enough space in the world economy to push through the kinds of reforms required to legitimize the new administration. Calderón will assume power before the Congress on the 1st of December. As with Fox's address, the parliamentary PRD has promised to prevent this.

There are other struggles across the country which are not related to the post-election crisis but which could merge with the civic resistance. The most advanced is in the southern state of Oaxaca, where an economic strike has turned political. Teachers, among the most militant sections of the Mexican working class, have formed a broad labour front and taken power in the capital city and a number of other municipalities. The PRI state governor has been rejected by the population and has gone into hiding while government offices have been closed and the police dispersed. The "Oaxaca Commune" is in its fifth month as negotiations with the federal government have stalled. The Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) expects a federal invasion at any moment and has erected barricades to defend the capital. APPO decided not to send a delegation to the national convention in Mexico City, although some members did attend in an unofficial capacity. There is support for the Oaxaca struggle within the national resistance movement. This includes recent calls by

people close to Obrador for the movement to send "human shields" to the state. When pressed to comment on the issue, Obrador has defended the Oaxaca struggle on one of the very few occasions he has been interviewed on national television since the July elections. (The Spanish-language video of the interview posted to his website, dated October 11th, at www.amlo.org.mx.)

The Zapatistas continue with their "Other Campaign", which took an ambiguously abstentionist position during the electoral process and targeted Obrador and the PRD in particular. The Zapatistas rightly expected Obrador to win the elections and to govern the country, much as he had the capital city, as a "social neoliberal." A statement dated September 26th rehearsed these criticisms and, in failing to recognize the changed circumstances, definitively distanced the EZLN from the movement around Obrador. In referring specifically to the base of the movement, the statement reads in part: "These people deserve and have our respect, but their path leads to a place we don't want to go. We share with them neither path nor destination. . . and what's more we think that it wouldn't be ethical to "join up" or "take advantage of" a mobilization for which we haven't done anything, except maintain a critical skepticism." (The full statement in English is available at: www.elkilombo.org/documents/pedestrians4.html.)

Marcos has taken the Other Campaign to the north of the country in an attempt to break the Zapatistas out of their geographically-imposed isolation. With their sectarian perspective on the post-electoral period, the Zapatistas' continuing isolation will be of their own making.

The movement around Obrador is broad and complex. It is developing in the context of a structural political crisis in which the conditions for neoliberal rule have been disrupted. A variety of scenarios are possible, but it is beyond doubt that the left tide rising from Latin America has now reached our continent. **R**

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Neoliberalism, the Metamorphosis of the State, and the New Political Regime in Mexico

Richard Roman and Edur Velasco Arregui

Mexican society is going through an organic crisis in a period of a deepening integration of its labour force and resources into U.S. capitalism. The organic crisis and the deep integration are intimately related, but it would be wrong to see the organic crisis as simply the result of the processes of integration that started in the 1980s and escalated with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994. Alongside integration, there has been political liberalization and a partial electoral democratization. The hope of the Mexican elites and U.S. policy-makers has been that the partial democratization would culminate in a two-party system in which two pro-business parties would alternate. The dramatic current conflict over the 2006 Mexican Presidential election, with the candidate of the right Felipe Calderón winning official sanction as the electoral victor, and Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the centre-left being rejected due to a fraudulent electoral count, is the most visible sign of the crisis and the failure of the two party vision.

The two business party strategy was first shaken by the sudden emergence of a populist-nationalist electoral challenge to the emergent two-party regime in 1988. A new electoral coalition, composed of a split from the old ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), existing left parties and groups, and social movements, defeated the two old parties in the 1988 presidential election. The presidential election was stolen by the ruling party with the collusion of the former main opposition party, the Party of National Action (PAN), a right-wing party, and the new electoral coalition went on to become a third party, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). While this new party was not anti-business and only sought a more balanced and more nationalist approach to the development of Mexican capitalism, it was seen as a challenge to the desire for a safe alternation in parties. The new President, Carlos Salinas, carried out a small reign of terror against the PRD and rapidly moved Mexico forward towards integration with the U.S. via massive privatizations, NAFTA, and liberalization. The limitations and internal contradictions of the new left-center opposition PRD as well as the use of the media and the state to marginalize it led to its defeat in the next two presidential

elections in 1994 and 2000. The PRD, however, gained footholds in municipalities, states, Congress and, most importantly, the government of Mexico City, which had recently been returned to self-government.

The PRI was defeated in the 2000 presidential elections. A significant portion of the voters for the victorious candidate, Vicente Fox of the PAN, were voting strategically. Many felt that the PRD had no chance of winning the 2000 presidential election and that the main thing was the defeat of the one-party regime. Thus a vote for the Right was believed to be a contribution to a transition to democracy and a better life. And certainly the defeat of the PRI was a major defeat for the party and its multitude of careerists. But it was *not* a victory for democracy. Rather it was a victory for a new power bloc that included the Catholic and business Right and elements of the old regime. The hopes raised by the defeat of the old ruling Party in the 2000 presidential election have been sorely disappointed. Mexico has not become less repressive and more democratic. Poverty and inequality continued to increase. The Fox presidency continued the regressive neoliberal policies, supported the leadership of some of the most undemocratic and corrupt unions, and continued to tolerate and practice widespread corruption.

The new power bloc sought to continue its rule, by hook or by crook. Some of its key goals, such as privatization of oil and power, labour law reform, had been frustrated because of the political stalemate in Congress. As well, the Catholic right within this power bloc was hoping to carry out a social counter-revolution and the political elites of the PAN sought more power, influence, and, of course, impunity, for massive corruption. The big obstacle to this project of continuity of the Right in power was the tremendous popularity of the PRD's mayor of Mexico City, López Obrador. This new power bloc and its political operatives were determined to derail any possibility of López Obrador becoming the new President, an outcome which could jeopardize the more radical elements of their agenda as well as possibly subject them to investigation for corruption.



The Right, the State and the Old Ruling Party

The historic bloc that now seeks to consolidate its domination of Mexico is a “coalition” of the old historic Right in Mexico, both Catholic and free enterprise, that formed in and around the PAN; the neoliberal wing of the old PRI that includes elements from the Salinas (1988-1994) and Zedillo (1994-2000) presidencies, and some elements from the PRI, such as the leader of the national teachers union, Elba Esther Gordillo.

The recent electoral fraud is just the latest attempt to guarantee continuity of their rule. Their first clumsy attempt was the *desafuero*, an attempt to disqualify López Obrador from eligibility to run for President through a petty and spurious legal manoeuvre. When the *desafuero* failed in the face of popular opposition and its transparent purpose, they resorted to a combination of the normal methods of a bourgeois democracy and those of the old PRI. When the duopoly of TV, Azteca and Televisa, didn’t ignore López Obrador, they vilified him as a far leftist, a Chavéz, who would destabilize Mexico. In collaboration with the national government, the media sought to create a climate of fear and a desire for stability. The electoral manipulation – which started with the failed *desafuero* – has to be understood as a long campaign of controlling the outcome by any means necessary. It is a mistake to focus only on the fraudulent elements in the actual voting and counting, though they were many.

Half of the population believes that the presidential election was “won” fraudulently. The PRD made huge gains in increasing its popular vote to 35% and increasing its representation in both houses of Congress significantly. The popular hopes for democratic change and a turn away from neoliberal economic and social policy coalesced around the candidacy of López Obrador and survived a number of dirty tricks and a fierce anti-López Obrador media campaign. The great anger created by the repeated attempts

to deny López Obrador the presidency have not been dissipated as they were in 1988, when Cárdenas chose not to directly challenge the fraud but wait for the next election.

There are no indications of any vertical splits or rank and file dissension in the armed forces. That means, if it chooses to — or if pushed into a corner — the state can use its monopoly over coercive force to smash political movements. Use of such force would also be a dangerous route as it could deter future investment and generate more protests. López Obrador has thus mobilized radically but also sought to contain violence and direct challenges to the police and army.

López Obrador, the PRD, and the Anti-Fraud Movement

The PRD, in its almost 20 years of existence, has articulated a defence of nationalized industries and democratic rights, and concern for the growing inequality and poverty in Mexico. Most of the left and many progressive social movements initially joined the PRD in the hope of building a left alternative to the PAN and the PRI. In the first years of the PRD’s existence, the government of Salinas (1988-1994) assassinated several hundred of its middle level leadership. While many progressive sectors of the population had great hopes for the PRD, both the left and insurgent social movements were marginalized or coopted by the former PRI leaders who dominated the PRD from the beginning. The PRD never became the democratic and left party that was hoped for by much of the Left. The authoritarian and opportunistic political culture of the old PRI as well as of some of the Left made the PRD an arena of competing, vertically organized fractions leaving little room for democratic and popular participation. The leadership viewed the popular classes only as voters and was suspicious of independent social and workers’ movements. This leadership has, in general, been careful to distance itself from insurgent movements, such as the Zapatistas and the people of Atenco.

As well, the “left-populist” ideology of the PRD (which was never anti-capitalist) had been steadily discarded. As the PRD presidential candidate, Andrés López Obrador adopted the slogan, “For the benefit of all Mexicans....the Poor First.” He took great pains to reassure Mexican capital and the USA, and to distance himself from the new emerging Latin American left. But since the electoral fraud, his discourse has become increasingly class-centred, anti-neoliberal, while retaining its left-populism frame. The changes in discourse can be attributed to a variety of factors: the rejection by business and the political right of his ascent to the Presidency; the course of struggle and dialogue with the movement; and the need for radicalized rhetoric to energize his plebian base. The evolution of López Obrador’s discourse is important because he remains the only leader that gives cohesiveness to the national mobilization against the regime. Yet, his motives and ideology cannot be equated with that of his mass base. The everyday consciousness of Mexico’s popular classes also has its own roots and dynamics in Mexico’s history of popular insurrectionary struggles – 1810, 1861-1867, 1910-1920 – and →

recurrent resistance to repression and the injuries of capitalist development, the latter intensifying with neoliberalism.

It is misleading to equate the PRD only with its leaders and its leaders only with the ex-Salinistas in the circles around López Obrador. The leadership itself has divisions, and the PRD is not a cohesive party. It is a complex alliance of bureaucratic elements, social movements, communal groups and left currents that has no clear ideology or programme. It includes layers of former PRIistas but also currents and movements that have long fought the PRI as a party and PRIismo as a political culture of corruption, opportunism, and repression. The heterogeneity of the PRD is even truer of the broader movement that supported López Obrador's presidential campaign; and it has broadened even more in the anti-fraud movement. The ideological heterogeneity and diffuseness of the mass base of Obradorism includes strong anti-neoliberal, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist elements. These different moods, hopes, meanings, currents co-exist in an extremely fluid situation that may change the relations between the various actors and their varied bases. A static view of the PRD – particularly in the broader anti-fraud Obradorism that had formed – cannot be viewed in a static way, as some critics on the left have done.

La Convención Nacional Democrática (CND)

The size and intensity of the mass resistance to the imposition of their candidate as President by the right has been unprecedented. The most radical development has been the formation of the CND. The CND has only had one meeting: a rally of over one million people at the Zócalo of Mexico City in which López Obrador was declared President-elect; three commissions selected from by the PRD leadership endorsed; a plan to hold another convention in March assented to; and elements of a course of struggle announced.

Alongside that development, the three parties that formed the electoral coalition that supported López Obrador for President, formed a common electoral front, the Frente Amplio Progresista (FAP), for the next three year period. The formation of the FAP and the formation of the CND represent the two track approach of the Obradorista movement. López Obrador has opted for a strategy of radical tactics that combines extra-parliamentary mass civil disobedience with more or less normal politics within the federal legislature and state governments. This combined strategy involves challenging symbolically and, perhaps, in some not yet clear ways, practically, the legitimacy and authority of the incoming President, while continuing to participate in Congress, as well as in the DF (Mexico City) and those state governments which his coalition governs.

The CND is a novel kind of movement. It combines social movements, political parties and other political formations, some unions...

The FAP is a coalition of electoral parties with significant representation in the national and state congresses as well as municipal governments. The CND represents an organization of movements and parties claiming, in an ambiguous way, an alternate sovereignty, having ratified the election of the officially “defeated” President, and proclaiming a strategy of mass action and civil disobedience to not only overturn the fraudulent presidential election but also to fight for social justice and against neoliberalism. It has also called for a plebiscite to determine whether Mexico should have a new Constitutional Congress.

The development of the CND will be determined by the dynamics of the political struggle in Mexico, as well as the internal dynamics and strategies that develop within the movement. The CND is a novel kind of movement. It combines social movements, political parties and other political formations, some unions and dissident currents in other unions, in an organization that combines characteristics of a broad social movement (a movement of movements), a party or pre-party formation, and an alternative government. This broad organizational umbrella is still without its own constitution or decision-making processes, and houses a great variety of tendencies that lean in different directions regarding strategies and goals. They are united, however, in opposition to the new power bloc and against the excesses of neoliberalism. They have taken the slogan of the 1910 Revolution, “Sufragio Efectivo, No Reección,” (Effective Suffrage and No Re-election), and modified it to “Sufragio Efectivo, No Imposición” (Effective Suffrage and No Imposition).

While the operational character of the CND is yet to be defined, it is a political organization aiming at assuming governmental power and/or transforming government (an ambiguity within the movement). There are a number of key questions about its future. One is simply whether popular opposition will continue after December 1 when the official President is sworn in. That will, of course, depend on what the CND does at the local and state levels, and how effectively it can combine struggles over local

and national issues with the question of national power. Though the base of the Obradorista and anti-fraud movement support is overwhelmingly working class, there is significant heterogeneity. This social, political and geographic heterogeneity – alongside the organizational weakness of the PRD itself – means that the local and regional movements will have a great deal of autonomy from the center. The only element holding them together is the moral-political authority of López Obrador.

His radicalized rhetoric has been having an impact on the popular classes in affirming a view of Mexico as divided by poor versus rich. The malaise among working people towards the poverty and income polarization that Mexican capitalist development has produced, particularly with neoliberalism, has now assumed a national political expression as opposition to the fraud and a struggle for a “social republic.” The anti-establishment rhetoric from 1988 to 2006 that received large-scale expression was focused at the political level on the failings of the transition to democracy. Opposition to integration into the U.S. Empire and the ravages of neoliberalism had marginal expression. A populist class rhetoric is now dominant, with the Presidential electoral fraud articulated as a fraud of the rich against the poor, rather than a fraud of a particular party (mainly the PRI) against the people.

The victory of the Presidency by the PAN in 2000, and its 2006 electoral manipulations, has confirmed that electoral alternation of parties has neither altered the neoliberal onslaught or state-engineered electoral corruption. The old popular discourse had the political class of PRIistas as the source of Mexican suffering. It has been replaced by a ‘populist-classist’ view – reflecting the ambiguity and range of the oppositional rhetoric that incorporates both populist and class elements – in which the culprit is now seen as the Rich, the big domestic and foreign capitalists, and their supporters in the church hierarchy. The PAN is viewed as their unabashed representative.

The key issues about the evolution of the CND are over its internal structure, its short, medium and long-term goals, its strategies, and the relationship between political parties and social movements inside and outside the CND. These issues have yet to be debated, clarified and decided upon at a national level though certainly there are many discussions going on within its various organizations, currents and base. There are tensions between the top-down style of leadership of López Obrador and the PRD and the actual mass grassroots participatory character and bottom-up rhetoric of the CND. There remains a great ambiguity about whether the CND is a mobilizing tool of López Obrador, and/or the FAP, or whether the FAP the parliamentary force of the CND.

The local structures of the CND will, at least initially, be ad

hoc and of an internal character largely determined by the local movements. The discursive rhetoric of democratic participation from below will be an important factor in pushing the movement towards democratic forms. The anti-fraud movement and the CND are clearly aiming at power at the national level. What is not clear yet – and will only develop in the course of struggle internally and externally – is whether the CND is fighting for an alternate group in the presidency (López Obrador as President) or a different form of power (a new *constituyente* that would organize a different political regime). The demands for radical socio-economic change being articulated now coexist with the demands for political change in a way that has not been clearly elaborated. The notion of a democratic social republic points in a direction but without being clear on what the content of a social republic would be (regulated capitalism, beyond capitalism?)

The next period will see a complex struggle among the different elements of the anti-fraud movement to define the character and strategy of the struggle. There will be strong institutional pressures to play within the rules of the game of Congress and government and subordinate popular mobilization to pressure tactics. There may also be strong pressures from López Obrador and/or the CND to make this movement of movements and parties the main motor of struggle. As well, the daily suffering of the masses of poor people and the hopes raised will create a strong pressure from below to push for demands that go beyond formal political-electoral to demands of social and economic justice. The challenge to López Obrador is to coordinate these movements and prevent cooptation of his institutional political supporters while preventing demoralization of the mass movements.

The challenge from the point of view of those who want to build an alternate democratic Mexico from below is to build the CND as an institution that is democratic, representative, and not subordinate to López Obrador, the PRD, or the FAP. The outcome of these struggles to define the nature of the opposition in Mexico will not only be determined by the debates and struggles among the various components of the opposition but also by the actions of the state and the Right.

There was a lull in protest activities of the Obradoristas in Mexico City while López Obrador campaigned in the elections within his home state of Tabasco. His strong effort there was part of a long-term electoral strategy of building a bloc of support in southern states. The strategy failed in Tabasco in the face of an extremely violent and dirty campaign on the part of the PRI government and of problems within the PRD in the state. The national campaign will reemerge on the center stage on November 20 when López Obrador takes the oath of office at the Zócalo of →

Mexico City in front of his supporters. And it will take on a more confrontational dimension when the movement tries to prevent Calderón from taking the oath of office on December 1. Following these events, López Obrador will tour the country promoting the development of local CNDs as the run-up to its second national meeting scheduled for March 20, 2007.

The Other Oppositions: APPO (Oaxaca) and the EZLN/Other Campaign

The prospects for the development of the CND as a movement of movements aimed at taking political power in one form or another will also be shaped by the unpredictable outcome of the revolt and crisis of Oaxaca. The Oaxacan popular movement, the People's Popular Assembly of Oaxaca (APPO), has challenged the state government and fought for a combination of political, social and economic changes. There are some who see the APPO as a model of what the CND should or could be. The APPO has occupied Oaxaca City and parts of the state for over four months. At the same time, it has shown a willingness to negotiate with the national government to try to achieve important political and economic goals. Rebellion has been an assertion of dignity. It has been heroic, bottom-up, participatory, and had massive support. It has been a weapon of pressure and negotiation with an intact federal state, not an attempt to overthrow it. Though there are revolutionaries among the activists, the movement at this time is not revolutionary. Though much of the base supports the CND, it is not a formal part of the CND.

The Oaxaca dynamic meshes with national dynamics in complex and explosive ways. Calderón, the incoming President wants President Fox to settle the Oaxacan "hot potato" before he assumes office on December 1. Calderón needs the support of the PRI both practically and morally for the assumption of his Presidency. But the Oaxacan negotiations are stalemated over the removal of the PRI Governor of Oaxaca, a non-negotiable demand of APPO and the critical section 22 of the teachers' union there. This is, in turn, a completely unacceptable demand to the PRI and its networks of *caciques* (political bosses) throughout the state. Attempts to buy the movement by economic concessions and token political concessions without the removal of the Governor have failed to date. Oaxaca faces the possibility of a brutal repression by state and federal forces that would produce an unpredictable political situation for the process of the assumption of office by the incoming President. It is also likely to have a powerful impact on the development of the CND in the coming period.

The absence of the "Other Campaign" and the Zapatistas has been notable. The Zapatista leadership has been deliberately absent from the scene in this period of mass mobilizations in Oaxaca and nationally. Their bitter denunciations of López Obrador for his policies and the welcoming of ex-Salinas officials into his circle of advisers along with their ambiguity at best, confusion at worst, about elections and power, and their lack of a strategy of struggle, have marginalized them from these historic developments. While Oaxacan supporters of the Other Campaign have been involved in the struggles there, the national leadership of the Other Cam-

paign has expressed their support for the struggle but has, until recently, chosen to stay apart from it. They argued that their more direct involvement in the Oaxaca struggle would give more credibility to the attempt by the Right to discredit APPO by calling it a guerrilla movement. In regard to the CND, they recently issued a statement expressing their respect for the base of the movement while stating that they neither share the path or the destination of the movement. While they have chosen to stay outside the two most important struggles in Mexico since the 1930s, the Zapatistas have yet to define their own strategy. The political situation of unprecedented mass mobilizations in Oaxaca and nationally has evolved in a way quite different from their expectations of a López Obrador victory and a regime of social democratic management of neoliberalism. The Other Campaign has announced that it will move both toward a new both strategy and organizational structure in the next few months. They have spelled out a process of democratic decision-making. Marcos, their most prominent leader, is touring the North and continuing consultations. Meanwhile the South, particularly in Oaxaca and Tabasco where fraudulent state elections accompanied by violence by the PRI government just occurred on October 15, is at the boiling point and the Center simmers. The rhythm of the Other Campaign is completely out of synch with the most dynamic popular movements in recent Mexican history. But recently, they have taken a turn on APPO, announcing that they would view any attack on APPO as an attack on them. It is not yet clear what this will mean in practice.

The Crisis and Popular Struggle

The crisis of legitimacy of the Mexican regime has grown with the shift to neoliberal policies and continental integration. Income polarization and poverty have sharply increased; emigration continues at a dramatic rate; and state repression and corruption remain unabated. The fraudulent presidential election process has sharply politicized popular discontents as well as pushing the democratic demands of civil society in a class polarizing direction. Class relations and Mexican politics are in a complex and fluid process of redefinition. The popular forces of opposition need to find ways of working together for immediate goals such as jobs, housing, health care, preservation of public ownership of oil and electricity. These goals would further the political capacities of ordinary people, meet needs and further the struggle for fundamental transformation. This means resistance to divide and rule ploys by the regime. It means decisions by ordinary people through democratic organs not decisions by political elites consented to by ordinary people. It means advancing popular understanding of the relations between everyday problems, the character of the political regime, and the dynamics of global capitalism. The CND has the potential to be the vehicle for that development but only if it develops in a democratic, participatory and principled manner. The Left needs to fight for that direction within the CND. **R**

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From Rigged Elections in Mexico to Popular Education in Toronto

Thomas Marois

On September 21st the recently-formed Latin American Solidarity Committee (LASC-Toronto) held its first public event on the electoral fraud in the race for the Mexican Presidency. LASC-Toronto emerged out of TASC (the Toronto-Atenco Solidarity Committee), a group of local activists doing solidarity work in response to the brutal May 2006 Atenco and Texcoco police attacks in Mexico. It became obvious that many wanted to continue on with broader Latin American solidarity work.

As of 6 September the conservative Felipe Calderon of the National Action Party (PAN) has been officially declared president-elect following the July 2nd elections. The Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) moderate left candidate Andres Manuel López Obrador maintains that the governing PAN party, with outgoing President Vicente Fox, rigged the elections. López Obrador and his supporters have provided evidence of electoral fraud, including videos showing ballot box stuffing, ballots in favor of the PRD found in the garbage, evidence that some polling areas had more votes than registered voters, and that the early-count computer program skewed the initial count of votes. The Federal Electoral Tribunal, in light of the PRD proofs, ordered a recount, but of only 9% of polling stations – not the full recount demanded by the PRD and its supporters. The recount reduced Calderón's votes by 4000, reducing the margin of 'victory' from 0.58% to 0.56%. The electoral authorities admit that there were irregularities, but say that these irregularities are not enough to reverse Calderón's win.

In response, it is estimated that millions of López Obrador supporters have been mobilized across the country for massive meetings in Mexico City, and to establish a permanent camp in the Zócalo and occupy a major thoroughfare in Mexico City. A September 16th assembly was convened by López Obrador to determine how to proceed with the opposition to the vote, a process that could last years and may involve some form of parallel government. However one looks at the elections it is clear that Mexico is a deeply divided country, between north and south, and the wealthy and the poor.

At the LASC event, the presenters and participants explored the history behind the National Action Party (PAN) and Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) electoral rivalry, the political dynamics of the post-electoral fraud situation, links to the Oaxaca teachers' strike, and the meaning of the mobilizations in support of leftist PRD presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador against the right-wing PAN 'president-elect' Felipe Calderón.

The following is a description and individual assessment of the LASC-Toronto event on Mexico. Upon reflection, I suggest that two broader and important implications can be drawn from the LASC event. First, a new collective space has opened up in Toronto for critically assessing and acting in solidarity with Latin American popular struggles. Second, engaged participation can be used effectively as a form of popular education and radicalization within activist organizations in Canada. This is not so say it is the only educational methodology, but rather that it is an effective alternative that offers specific advantages.

THE MEXICO PRESENTATIONS

The LASC-Toronto event on Mexico was held at Concord Café, a locally-owned, latino-run restaurant bar in the Bloor West community of Toronto. Attendance exceeded expectations, with about 70 people (over!) filling the space. A wide range of interested persons showed up: men and women ranging in age from 20 to 60 years old, activist and non-activist, professionals and students, radicals and conservatives, unionists, families with children, and people of diverse ethnicities. In this, a wide range of political viewpoints could be shared.

At a descriptive level, then, *what* the event offered is two-fold. First, it was a source of critical information that is commonly not available in Canadian media on the events surrounding the Mexican elections. Second, it provided a forum of engaged participation for people to both question and present their own ideas drawing on their own lives.

The event combined a number of diverse informative mediums throughout the evening. It was opened by spoken-word poets Helen Yohannes and La Revolutionaria with words of resistance and solidarity. As members of the RHYME poetry collective, a by-youth-for-youth poetry group, they aim to show solidarity and make their presence felt in activist movements in the Toronto area. Following RHYME, a founding LASC member spoke on the history, evolution, and purpose of LASC. The facilitator then invited everyone to introduce themselves to someone beside them that they *did not* know in the spirit of building community.

Two commentaries introduced the PAN-PRD rivalry, the electoral fraud, and the Mexican mobilizations in response. The first was offered by Dick Roman, a sociology professor from the University of Toronto who has studied Mexican working class →

politics for the last 35 years. Roman gave an overview that ranged from the reform platform of the PRD and López Obrador to the current more radical Oaxaca teachers' strike. Roman stressed that while the mega-meetings (from hundreds of thousands to millions of people) in Mexico City were organized from the centre, there have been extensive and genuine grass-movement mobilizations emerging.

The second commentary was offered by Raghu Krishnan, an independent writer who has lived in Mexico City. He presented a slide show of the Mexico City mobilizations in support of López Obrador, making a striking comparison of the massive character of the plantón (the occupation of a major thoroughfare in Mexico City) to the 12 km of the Toronto streetscape that would be covered. Krishnan also noted the breadth of the social forces involved and the strong sense that this was "the people" (or the working class) of Mexico City. This was linked to, and confirmed by, his experiences with family and in the working-class area of Tláhuac of Mexico City. While he believed the movement to be the opening of a new phase in Mexican politics, there remained the paradoxical and ongoing situation in Atenco, which has somewhat fallen by the wayside. The meeting also raised some additional financial support for Atenco solidarity.

The commentaries were followed by a 15-minute Australian documentary by *Dateline* ("The Great Mexican Standoff" originally aired August 30, 2006). The documentary included interviews from Mexican elites, working class individuals, children, and López Obrador himself. It offered a visually rich sense of the nature and reasons behind the plantón and popular resistance, including the dire poverty of most Mexicans contrasted to the extreme wealth of a small fraction. It documented some of the specific cases of fraud, including the suggested ballot box stuffing and the illegal use of government resources in favor of PAN. It illustrated the dirty campaign waged against López Obrador, painted as a "danger for Mexico," and showed the mobilization's calls for a total recount, "vote for vote, polling station for polling station." Many at the LASC event commented that the video was very helpful in understanding the Mexican electoral fraud.

DEBATES & DISCUSSIONS

At this point, the event shifted gears into discussion. Rather than fielding questions from the audience to be taken by specific panelists, however, the event facilitator introduced an 'engaged discussion' format. Explaining that the format was unorthodox but meant to value participation, the facilitator first asked people to form small groups for discussion. People were to introduce themselves and choose one among them to later re-present the group's discussion and ideas to the whole. For the next 20 minutes, the small groups were asked to consider the following questions: "What?, So What?, Now What?"

The groups were asked to first discuss "what" they understand the *concrete* situation to be in Mexico. Participants were to simply describe what is going on now in Mexico, what they saw in the film, what they heard in the commentaries, or what they can offer from their own experiences in reference to the elections. Second, the groups were asked to consider "so what," or *why* what is

going on is of importance. This step helps open up a discussion on the more *abstract* and broader aspects of the concrete events just described. Third, and finally, the groups were challenged to consider "now what." This is a point meant to incite some form of *action* and commitment by discussing what needs and can be done. Brief discussion sheets describing the above format were circulated to help facilitate these small group debates.

Following these discussions, the small group representatives were then asked to re-present a brief summary of their discussion to the whole group. A range of comments and issues came forth. For example, one group debated the various social forces involved (political parties, popular movement, organized movement, etc.). Questions were raised on the differences between the popular movement and López Obrador/PRD and how the movement might evolve (i.e., separately from López Obrador or not). Others discussed the roles of the PRD and the PRI, and the position the Zapatistas. Still others remained on a more descriptive level of whether or not fraud actually occurred while others were more intent on forwarding the official position of the Zapatistas relative to the elections. The acute danger of state-sanctioned violence in Mexico and particularly in Oaxaca also came to the fore.



November 2nd demonstration in support of Oaxaca militants at the Mexican consulate in Toronto.

Following the small group presentations, the format allowed the opportunity to pose individual questions and comments to the meeting as a whole. Here, the facilitator's role was to deepen, synthesize, and redirect questions back to the audience so as to draw on the knowledge present in the group. In particular, the question of "now what?" challenged participants to offer concrete actions and commitments.

Questions over the spontaneity of the mobilizations, the role of the USA, and the limitations of the movement emerged, as did comparisons with Bolivia and Venezuela. A diversity of ideas from a participant-driven process emerged: writing letters to Foreign Affairs Minister Peter Mackay; drawing inspiration from Mexican struggles to ground our own actions; seeking new connections of solidarity in Toronto with non-Latin American groups; preparing a response to possible violent repression in Oaxaca; linking to Ontario teachers' unions in support of the Oaxaca teachers'

resistance; and highlighting the complicity of Canadian firms, like Scotiabank, with the state repression in Mexico.

While support for this popular education format was broad, concerns and limits also need noting. For one, it was clear that not all small group representatives were true to what was discussed, but rather saw it as a personal opportunity to speak publicly. Some individuals take more space in the small group discussions than others; some welcomed this while others resented it. While the reaction to the format overall was positive, some question whether participation is indeed enhanced over traditional panel formats. Those who would have spoken up in an open discussion also generally speak up the most in small groups. This raises also reservations over the level of critical political education received in a popular education format in a largely information and debate type meeting. These concerns must be addressed as a process of organizational learning and reflection on how activism and education meet.

IMPLICATIONS

Why the LASC-Toronto Mexico event and the popular education format are important returns to the question of forming a new space for solidarity and engaged participation.

First, a new space has opened up in Toronto for critically assessing and acting in solidarity with Latin American popular struggles. The event challenged the inadequacies of Canadian mainstream media and their supposed objective treatment of political events. Instead, a critical assessment was offered drawing on a range of sources, mediums, and perspectives. Such a critical space also allows new Canadian links to Mexican events. This is partly in exposing the Harper government's complicity in electoral fraud and explicit support for the PAN candidate Calderón, and partly in terms of activists forming solidaristic links with Mexican struggles in Canada.

A second implication is exploration of methodologies of meetings and popular education. Most people responded very positively to the engaged format, indeed commenting that this format made them more invested in the project. In this respect, an engaged format can be used as powerful form of popular education within activist organizations in Canada. For many activists outreach and the educational process is vital for solidarity, as education is always political. This stems from the need to overcome the dominance of mainstream influence while at the same time recognizing conflicting and overlapping social locations of power, such as gender, class, education, and race, found within society, and by extension, activist organizations.

The popular education and engaged participation format draws on an educational methodology which is strongly rooted in Latin American history and society. While the origins of popular education can be traced to 18th century revolutionary France, real examples of radical education are found in the 1890-1920 Chilean Workers' Education Movement, the 1920 Argentinean 'Plan of the 5000 million' under President Yrigoyen, popular universities established in El Salvador and Peru in the mid-1920s, and Sandino's anti-imperialist, guerrilla-based educational practices in 1920s Nicaragua. Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui has been

important to the theory around popular education, as have been Paulo Freire's work in Brazil and Chile post-1960s and Augusto Boal's ongoing innovations in popular theatre for emancipation in Brazil and globally.

A number of important themes resonate in this approach, which we attempted to be put into practice at the Mexico event, albeit imperfectly. Paulo Freire's writing sums them up well. He argues that organizing resistance to the dehumanizing effects of subordination (we can take neoliberalism as one example today) requires being constant, humble, and courageous, as well as demonstrating

- (a) *consistency* between words and actions,
- (b) *boldness* to confront one's own existence,
- (c) *radicalization*, not sectarianism, that leads to action,
- (d) the *courage to love*, as leading away from accommodation to this world and towards transforming it, and
- (e) an unfaltering *faith* in people, for it is with people that collective struggle is made.

The development of a critical consciousness, formed historically and in dialogue with the world views held by the popular classes, forms the core of solidarity wherein people educate one another, mediated by the world around them – here, critical knowledge is created in solidarity with action, and action created in solidarity. Since people produce social reality, transforming reality is a historical task for people that demands praxis – reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. Activism alone would never suffice.

THE FUTURE OF LASC-TORONTO?

It has been widely commented that LASC-Toronto is filling an important gap in the activist community in Toronto by providing a critical space for pan-Latin American solidarity work, while not replacing existing social networks. The future appears promising, but wrought with challenges. How to organize, how to reach out to the Latin American community in Toronto, how to act effectively in Toronto, how to build solidarity with other non-Latin American struggles, and, as seen above, how best to mix activism and education are a few questions LASC must address.

More concretely, the LASC-Toronto agenda is already filling-up. LASC hosted an event with Bolivian labour leaders in mid-October, and will co-sponsor a November event around the Venezuelan elections. A 'Red Alert' is being organized with respect to the state repression in Oaxaca. In addition, LASC is discussing what it might additionally take on with to better address solidarity work and further outreach. It appears that Latin American solidarity now has a new leg to stand on in Toronto. **R**

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Censorship and Propaganda: Harper's Neoconservative Media Front

Nishant Upadhyay

The “free-press”—that is, an autonomous press free of state regulation and censorship—continues to be the ideological myth of the day. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman famously debunked this myth in their classic book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Here, the authors identify five mediating filters through which the news passes through before it reaches the public. Such filters include: capitalist ownership of the news; the news dependency on advertising revenue; sourcing from PR firms and elite groups; flak, or attempts to counter or neutralize dissident messages by elite groups; and anti-communist (or, pro-capitalist) ideology. With these filters, the ruling capitalist and political classes are able to influence, to censor, modify, or change the news in order to uphold, reproduce, or legitimize their worldview and interests. Indeed, such filters often lead to the exclusion of voices at society's margins and ideologies that challenge the status quo. Thus, the news often reflects or expresses the dominant ideologies and hegemonic struggles of the ruling political and capitalist classes.

Explicit state censorship must be included in Chomsky and Herman's model

as an additional media filter. China, North Korea and Pakistan all censor their media. So does the U.S. The states of Canada, the U.K and Australia are increasingly attempting to control and censor the media too. Media censorship in Canada, however, is not entirely new. In his article “Chameleon on a Changing Background,” Canadian political-economist Reg Whitaker defines censorship as a value driven instrument of power used by an authority to control, restrict, or otherwise interfere with the form or content of expression or the free flow of information.

Whitaker identifies two ways in which censorship is explicitly political in nature. Firstly, censorship is most often associated with the direct exercise of state coercion. Secondly, censorship's exercise simultaneously legitimizes and de-legitimizes different groups in the society and reinforces or challenges existing power relationships. According to Whitaker, the use (or misuse) of power plays an important role in the dynamics of censorship. The power that comes from the political standing of a party, person or group brings politics into censorship and censorship into politics. Censorship plays a major role in protecting or promoting some values, while suppressing others. The dividing

line between protected and proscribed values, beliefs, ideas and expressions is always a result of competing claims and political stands—which again defines the dynamic, yet unbalanced relationship between the centre and the margin. Throughout the 1990s, the Canadian state became a more active facilitator of censorship demands posed by the dominant neoliberal blocs.

Since the ascendance of the neoconservative Harper bloc in 2006, there has been a more aggressive state attempt to censor and control the relative autonomous workings of the Canadian capitalist media. The Harper government has been involved in four different cases of practicing media censorship. The prohibition of media to cover the repatriation ceremonies of soldiers who died in the so called “Peace Mission” in Afghanistan; Harper's recent decision on having press conferences only with the regional news press and not the national news press; the silence of Conservative MPs on the marriage of two gay RCMP constables; and the ban on letting an Environmental Canada scientist talk about his book on global warming all serve to illustrate how the Harper government has tried to promote its own ideol-

ogy while preventing counter-ideologies to flourish.

First, the Federal Government decided to ban the media from covering the repatriation ceremonies of the soldiers who died in the “Peace Mission” in Afghanistan. In the past, the Canadian media was given full rights to cover every aspect of the Canadian state’s military foreign policy, including the repatriation ceremonies. Harper’s press clampdown marks the first time in Canadian history that the Federal Government attempted to conceal the death of Canadians. The families of the dead were not even asked when the administration made this decision. Censorship is nonetheless the Harper government’s strategy of promoting its own ideology and manufacturing consent to an unpopular war. Due to public outrage, the Harper administration was forced to call back the decision.

Second, Harper decided to stop talking to the national news press based in Ottawa; instead, Harper decided to only talk to the regional news press. According to him, the national press is biased against him and his Conservative Party. According to journalist Don Martin, “Harper sees Ottawa filled with grassy knolls and Liberal-loving assassins hiding behind everyone. He has extended his partisan paranoia to include the media as part of a secret liberal conspiracy to deny him his destiny. Everywhere he looks someone is out there to get him.” Since Harper fears the so-called liberal media’s ability to paint him in a negative “neo-conservative” image, Harper decided to censor news related to him and his government in the national press. Again, Harper employs censorship to facilitate the reproduction of his government’s ideology by neutralizing oppositional points of view.

Third, PM’s office warned the conservative MPs not to comment on the marriage of the gay RCMP constables last month. According to the *Daily News*, “it’s just the latest in a concerted effort by Prime

Minister Stephen Harper to control and limit his new government’s public message track [. . .] this follows party strategists’ successful suppression during the election campaign of outspoken social conservatives whose opinions might have harmed the party’s climb to power.” Being against gay marriages paints a negative image on the minds of the majority of the public and it is a well known fact that majority of the MPs in the Conservative Party are against it. Thus one can see that in order to curb further damage of the conservative image, PM’s office took steps to stop its MPs from talking which might not be welcomed by the Canadians and may create unnecessary debates against the government. Hence we see again that the government is using popular means to curb the freedom of speech of its MPs and the right of the Canadians to know what is going on within the circles of the ruling government.

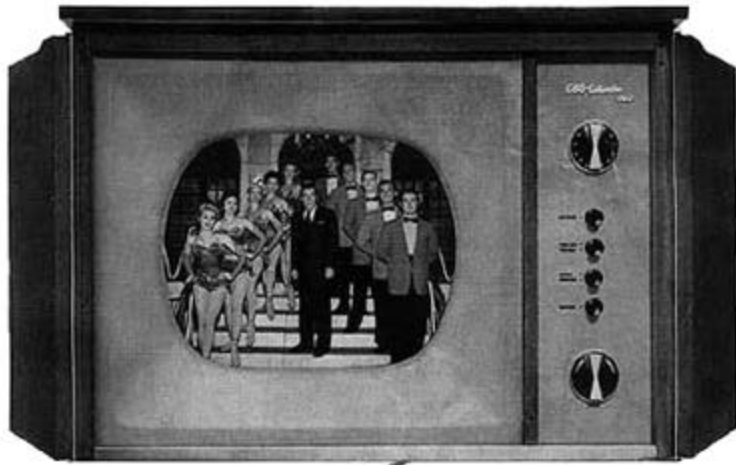
Fourth, in April 2006 the Harper government decided to prevent an Environment Canada scientist Mark Tushingham from talking about his new novel “*Hotter than Hell*.” The novel is set in the not-so-distant future when global warming has made many parts of the world too hot to live in and has prompted a war between Canada and the U.S. over water resources. The novel discusses Canada’s take on global warming and the ill-effects of it world over. The Harper government rationalized the censorship of Tushingham’s talks, saying such talks risked being confused with the Harper government’s position on such issues. There may be more dubious reasons for the ban. The novel risks prompt Canadians to challenge the Harper government to take more pro-environmental policies and thereby create more negative publicity about the Harper government’s controversial dropping out of the Kyoto Protocol. Here, Harper’s anti-green agenda is pre-emptively protected by neutralizing the potential for a fiction writer to have a public word.

The above four examples illustrate

how the Harper government censors media that challenge his ruling neoconservative ideology. Harper’s censorial actions mirror those of the Bush Administration’s. There is a growing resemblance between the way Harper deals with the media in Canada and the way Bush deals with the media in the U.S. Both administrations employ the discourse of “national security” to rationalize such censorship. And Canada’s capitalist media regularly tows line. The antagonism between the state and the media may not be as clear cut as liberals think. The Canadian media is terribly concentrated. As political economist David Skinner point outs, “due to the combination of government regulations which forbid the sale of Canadian media to foreign owners and relentless cost-cutting pressures on newsrooms already under the constant threat of media merger and accusations, only a handful of companies own most dailies, magazines, electronic media and an increasingly large share of weeklies.” Canwest, Sunmedia, Torstar, Rogers and other concentrated media corporations rule the national media scene.

The economic concentration of media ownership makes it easier for the Canadian state to practice censorship. To gain political or economic favors from the government communication and media policy apparatus, the mainstream media sometimes strategically follows the government’s ideological line. Many democratic media alternatives are forming to challenge the fusion of state censorship and media concentration. The censorial state-capitalist media synergy is being countered by thousands of activist web-blogs, mailing lists, websites, magazines and weeklies. Freedom from state censorship and a concentrated media system is essential to democracy. Only then might the people, not the political elite or the ruling economic class, make the nation. **R**

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WAR MAKING MEDIA

Tanner Mirrlees

North American elite cling to the “free-press” as a symbol of the success of their liberal capitalist democracies. For liberals, the free press facilitates free speech; it reflects a diversity of viewpoints, and thus reflects the diversity of competing ideas and opinions in a healthy pluralist society. For progressives, the free press acts as a facilitator of the public sphere, a watchdog institution (or, a fourth estate) that reports on the abuses of both the state and the capitalist classes. The free press fetters out fact from fiction, discerns truth from lie, serves the public interest, and keeps citizens actively informed about the world around them. Individual sovereignty is understood to be optimized by a free-press. Without a free-press, people wouldn’t be able to actively make informed decisions. Their decisions would be made for them by an overbearing state propaganda system.

For many North American elite, countries with state-run news organisations that promote propaganda affront the very principles of their beloved liberal democratic way of life. These states suppress (often very brutally, through the use of police, military, or intelligence agencies) attempts by the media or individual journalists to challenge the approved “government line.” Journalists that challenge state propaganda regularly find their professional careers and lives threatened. Firing, professional blacklisting, death threats, kidnapping, torture, and assassination are common ways that renegade journalists are dealt with.

The North American elite enjoys condemning such un-democratic media practices, so long as such practices are identified with other countries. The usual authoritarian or communist state suspects – Russia, Iran and China – are regularly cited as countries that desperately need a good dose of North American media democracy. Cultural and ethico-political distinctions are often made between us and them; between the North American way of life and the way of life of others by comparing our media system with theirs. Indeed, the North American elite indulges in the fantasy of living without government-controlled presses. They imagine themselves as living in democratic, free, and good countries as result. In turn, they lament the undemocratic, unfree and bad nature of countries with government controlled presses. With this distinction, the North American elite relish in the progress of their own societies and preach a new white man’s burden to the masses: North Americans need to correct, enlighten and liberate nations by giving them a free press!

Yet this dichotomy that divides us from them based on the principle of us living without press control is dubious. This is not to suggest that antagonisms or conflicts between the government and media never exist, that the North America’s media system is the same as Iran or China’s, or that state suppression of the free-press in other countries should be tolerated. Rather, conventional liberal theories of the free-press, which posit a structural separation and ideological antagonism between the media and the state, between the economic and the political sphere, is entirely inadequate for understanding the media, especially in times of war. Economically, the state facilitates and legitimizes capitalist concentration and domination of the free press through policies and

regulations. Politically, the state attempts to use, censor, or recruit the so-called free-press for explicit ideological purposes. There is a formal legal separation between the news media and the government in liberal democratic societies. But in practice, there has been more of a symbiotic political-economic relationship between the state and the media. This relationship is regularly tightened in times of national security crisis and cemented when a state wages war.

Such symbiotic state-media trends are most visible in the U.S. today. There, the news media—as the central means of producing and disseminating information to the working population—becomes the main means by which the state attempts to manufacture consent to war. Wars must always appear to be right, good, necessary, and inevitable in the mind of the public. The news media is the central terrain on which the state attempts to convince citizens that a war that serves narrow capitalist and elite political interests, is actually in their general interest. The U.S. state has six strategies for manufacturing public consent to war.

PRODUCING WAR AS A HOLLYWOOD FILM

The Vietnam War was the first television war, the first time images of death and destruction were directly broadcast into the private homes of North Americans. This actually worked against the state's attempt to build and maintain public support for U.S. imperialism. Television audiences were ideologically destabilized by coverage of spectacular carnage. The U.S. military learned two lessons from the capitalist media's coverage of Vietnam War. First, if anti-war consciousness develops among a working public whose government is engaged in war, the war-effort will be jeopardized because domestic political pressure will grow to end the war. Second, if not properly managed by the military, television news coverage of the war can facilitate an anti-war consciousness. From the late 1960s to the present day, the U.S. military has become increasingly obsessed with the way war is mediated by television journalists and news organizations. The U.S. military has become highly adept at building media and public relations into every stage of war, from planning, to preparation, to execution, to aftermath. From the Vietnam War forward, the state has attempted to save the public from the disorienting ideological trauma of bloody images of dead bodies and critical perspectives from anti-war activists.

Instead, the state scripted, produced, and delivered to the public – like a Hollywood film narrative with a clear beginning, middle, and end – an easily identifiable cast of evil villains and good guys, and a dramatic conflict that would eventually be resolved with a happy ending. The state's narrative strategy of producing war as a film evolves in four stages. In the “the Preliminary Stage,” the target of U.S. militarism is brought to the attention of the news and portrayed as a cause for “mounting national concern” or international security crisis (the target country is constructed as having a nasty dictator that threatens the U.S. or an allied state or is suffering from internal antagonisms that require benevolent intervention). In “the Justification Stage,” a number

of big news stories are produced to lend urgency to the case for armed intervention to bring about a rapid restitution of “normality” (the leader of the country or the country itself is evil; it threatens peace and security; it has weapons of mass destruction; it is a human rights abuser). In “the Implementation Stage” embedded journalists, pooling and censorship enable the military to control of coverage of the war. Finally, in “the Aftermath Stage” (when and if the war ends), the media reports a “return to normality” in the attacked country; the film-like coverage of the war, from beginning, middle, to end, then fades from the public mind.

A host of new military and government strategies for managing, producing, and circulating information about war have accompanied the production of war as a Hollywood film.

STATE PR FIRMS

Since the first U.S. war on Iraq, domestic capitalist public relations firms have been contracted to produce pseudo news-stories in support of U.S. foreign policy. PR firms are recruited by the state to sell foreign policy goals, just as corporations approach PR firms to promote a product. This client relationship allows the state to deny that it is directly propagandizing citizens (which would be a giant legal problem warranting class-action suits, as government propaganda directed at U.S. public has been officially illegal since the passing of the Smith-Mundt Act in 1946). The news media purchase these PR stories, just as they buy stories from freelance journalists. The Rendon Group is the U.S. military's chief public relations agency. To sell the first U.S. war in Iraq to the public, the Rendon group received about \$100,000 a month from the Department of Defense. Remember the 1990 media stories of Kuwaiti babies being removed from incubators →

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and thrown on the floor? Such propaganda was made for the state, compliments of the Rendon Group. Remember the Kuwaiti Nurse who claimed to have seen Iraqi soldiers removing the babies from the incubators, looting the maternity ward and killing the babies? This too was a carefully crafted Rendon Group disinformation campaign. The Kuwaiti nurse was (the daughter of a pro-American Kuwaiti ambassador) was contracted by the Rendon Group. The Rendon Group continues to profit through contracts with the state.

STATE MANAGEMENT OF JOURNALISTS

The state also attempts to manufacture consent to war by controlling what information is released to journalists. It regularly tramples on the autonomy of journalists and attempts to manage their war reportage. Journalists are dependent on the military for press releases, information regarding the war, and close-up footage of battle scenes. This dependency allows the military to preemptively select, doctor, or censor what information is newsworthy prior to journalists even writing the story. Most journalists

simply reproduce information about the war that the military has already prepared for them (also, by way of daily media briefing sessions). In the first stages of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, "Central Command" was the main Pentagon information center for drip-feeding journalists information, glossing over setbacks, limiting the facts and context, and using spin. In addition to these strategies, the state manages war coverage by embedding journalists with the troops. All airs of journalistic professionalism collapse through such practices. Journalists are given guns to defend themselves against the enemy, get trained about how to defend themselves against chemical weapons, and get psychologically attached to the soldiers. Objective reporting of wartime conflict is stifled as result.

STATE DESTRUCTION OF CONFLICTING VIEWPOINTS

When filtering and censorship fails to be an adequate mode by which the state produces war as Hollywood film, the state may attempt to physically destroy the source of counter-hegemonic narratives. Take the U.S. military's treatment of Qatar-based Al-



Jazeera, a news organization whose coverage of the Iraq occupation conflicts with U.S. military propaganda. U.S. fighter planes bombed Al-Jazeera's Afghanistan and Baghdad offices in 2003, during the initial attack on Iraq. One Al-Jazeera journalist was killed. *The Daily Mirror* recently published a leaked transcript of a meeting in April 2004 between George Bush and Tony Blair, where Bush jokingly talked of bombing Al-Jazeera. Others have been harassed and jailed (Sami al-Hajj, an Arab journalist, for example, has been imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay for the past four years). Independent American journalists are also coercively deterred from covering the war in a way that conflicts with state propaganda. When anti-occupation forces shot down a U.S. army helicopter in early November 2003, U.S. troops took cameras away from David Gilkey, a photographer for the *Detroit Free Press*. The Knight Ridder news service deleted all of his photos. In the same month, a letter to Pentagon press official Lawrence DiRita—signed by representatives of thirty news organizations from the United States and other countries—complained that they had documented numerous examples of U.S. troops physically harassing journalists and in some cases, confiscating or ruining equipment, digital camera discs, and videotapes.

THE STATE AND THE CAPITALIST MEDIA

The state has undoubtedly developed an array of strategies for managing the press during war, and many journalists and news organizations are rightfully frustrated by such attempts. However, to read the situation as yet another battle between the government and the free-press is to let the capitalist media corporations off the hook. They are also often responsible for manufacturing the public's consent to war, for producing war as a Hollywood film. They do so, not necessarily as result of a conspiracy to dupe the workers, but due to the structural logics of media capitalism. The primary goal of the capitalist media is to sell audiences to advertisers in hopes of generating revenue. Media managers often assume that middlebrow Americans are patriotic citizens who believe that the U.S. is always and unquestionably on the side of righteousness. Questioning the coverage of U.S. foreign policy risks losing the news corporation its audience base, and thus, its advertising revenue. As result, news stories that support the aims of U.S. foreign policy get sympathetic treatment; stories that undermine or challenge U.S. foreign policy goals usually don't (they are often buried between advertisements).

FRAMING WAR

The ideology of free-market reflectionism, tinged with the assumption of consumer patriotism, may influence the decision of editors to run some stories and curb others during war. Additionally, media editors may be disciplined by media owners that support U.S. foreign policy. One only needs to watch a clip of Rupert Murdoch's Fox news to understand how partisan this network is to the Bush Administration's foreign policy goals in the Middle East.

War is often turned into common sense through elaborate framing devices and conventions. "The most effective propaganda," Michael Parenti says, "relies on framing rather than on falsehood. By bending the truth rather than breaking it, using emphasis and other auxiliary embellishments, communicators can create a desired impression without resorting to explicit advocacy and without departing too far from the appearance of objectivity. Framing is achieved in the way the news is packaged, the amount of exposure, the placement (front page or buried within, lead story or last), the tone of presentation (sympathetic or slighting), the headlines and photographs, and, in the case of broadcast media, the accompanying visual and auditory effects." Media framing conventions bend people to the idea that war is righteous and necessary; that it is in their interest.

The U.S. is regularly portrayed as ultimately good while challengers are portrayed as ultimately evil. War and violence are construed as inevitable facets of an increasingly unstable world. Struggles for peaceful alternatives are excluded from mainstream media coverage or presented as naïve. The horrific experiences of war's victims are also excluded. War often appears to occur without human casualty. The underlying strategic goals of the U.S. in Iraq and the Middle East are regularly left unexplored. The public is fed a steady diet of alternative rationalizations for U.S. foreign policy: "our lives our being threatened by bad Islamic others"; "we are there to help the poor Iraqis build democracy"; "Muslim women are being oppressed by bad Taliban men and we must liberate them with our brand of liberal feminism"; "this is really about universal human rights." Sometimes the other perspective is never shown. We rarely hear the voices of those resisting occupation. Finally, all media war coverage is filtered through the ideology of nationalism. Every time a politician or military official speaks, they claim to represent the national interest, as if the billions of diverse people have some singular interest. This is a useful way of obscuring different points of view between citizens, mystifying racist, sexist and class-based social divisions and antagonisms, and stigmatizing those critical points of view that haven't been articulated as nationalist common-sense.

MEDIA DEMOCRACY AGAINST WAR AND IMPERIALISM

The state's attempt to censor and manipulate the media during wartime undermines media democracy while paradoxically, strengthening it. In response to the state's production of war as a Hollywood film, the recruitment of capitalist public relation firms, the embedding and censorship of journalists, the destruction of alternative news sources, and elaborate framing devices, alternative and activist-based media forums, networks, and sources have been galvanized. Between the ideological and coercive efforts of the state to reign in the tendencies of the capitalist press and the capitalist press's readiness to lend ideological support to state goals, the international movements against war and for media democracy use the new media in a struggle to end the imperialist war and the globalizing capitalist system that demands it. **R**

THE POLITICAL JOURNEY OF CHARLES GAGNON

Introduction by Mordecai Briemberg

Gore Vidal has said “history is Tuesday.” His acerbic witticism was directed at the infamously blank historical consciousness of the people of his country, which he dubbed the “United States of Amnesia.”

Still it is so much easier to recognize than to remedy an absence of historical consciousness. The transmission from past to present of the experiences of peoples’ struggles for a different world – in ways that are of practical use – is no simple task. Charles Gagnon undertook that task, and in this article we act simply as facilitators.

Charles Gagnon was the fourteenth child in a poor, farming family living in Bic, a small village on the Gaspé peninsula of Quebec. He was born March 21st, 1939. In the subsequent decades, he became an important contributor to the revolutionary struggle for a different Quebec and a different Canada. Charles Gagnon died November 17, 2005. On March 25, 2006 over 300 people gathered in Montreal to pay homage to his contributions.

The evening was an harmonious blend of readings, poems, film clips, photo-montage, live music and personal reminiscence. One reading was by Charles Gagnon himself, excerpts from an early book, in the form of a public letter to his father, recorded on film. Another reading was from Charles Gagnon’s last published essay, addressed to Quebec youth. Most readings were excerpts from interviews with Charles in the last weeks of his life, where he reflected on his political journey.

Below are four voices from that evening, most importantly that of Charles Gagnon. His reflections on his political journey are presented by Marie-Josée Nadal (‘The Last Testimony of Charles Gagnon’). She gathered them in conversation with Charles during his last weeks in hospital. Preceding that is a personal tribute delivered at the commemoration evening, by one of Charles’ anglophone comrades, Mordecai Briemberg. First we start with the voice of Raymond Legault, a co-chair of the commemoration evening, a long-time Quebecois comrade and friend of Charles Gagnon. This transcription of an English-language radio interview with Raymond Legault was broadcast April 8th, 2006.

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Full interviews are planned for publication together with three volumes of Charles Gagnon’s collected writings. The commemoration evening itself was filmed and an hour long DVD is being produced. (To order write: legault@colba.net) Charles Gagnon’s collected papers have been archived at the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM).

The English-language interview was broadcast on the “Redeye” program of Vancouver Cooperative Radio. Host for the interview was Mordecai Briemberg. You can access the audio on Rabble.ca podcasts [www.rabble.ca/rpn/files/re/rey-2006-04-14.mp3].

THE POLITICAL JOURNEY by Raymond Legault

In 1964 Charles was one of the founders of a new journal called “Quebec Revolution” and a short time later became a member of the F-L-Q, the Quebec Liberation Front. Could you sketch the character of the F-L-Q and Charles involvement with it?

The FLQ was a nationalist and revolutionary organization, a Quebec-based organization of the mid- and late-1960s. I guess you could say it was our small, local component of a much broader national liberation movement around the world in the 50s and 60s.

It basically advocated Quebec independence from what could be summarized as British-Anglo colonialism. It also advocated on behalf of workers’ rights against big capital, but this aspect was less prominent than independence. The FLQ was known for some writing and also a few bombings, but most notoriously for two kidnappings, that of Richard Cross, a British diplomat, and of Pierre Laporte, who was then Quebec Minister of Labour. Charles was a leader of the FLQ and was identified with Pierre Vallières as one of the two main ideologues of the movement.

He was imprisoned, was he not, for his involvement with the FLQ?

He was actually imprisoned a few times. He was imprisoned in New York when he and Vallieres protested at the UN calling for political prisoner status for FLQ detainees in Quebec. But he was jailed in Quebec for over two and one-half years in two segments for his FLQ activity and also after the October crisis in 1970.

What led Charles to turn away from the FLQ and propose instead the formation of a revolutionary workers' party?

I guess it was the main contradiction within the FLQ: on the one hand, some people stressed much more the national liberation aspects and some people, including Charles, put much more emphasis on the social and economic contradictions, the fundamental opposition to capitalism and imperialism, and denouncing both foreign and home-grown capital. This group of people also a definite interest in organizing a structured movement, a structured party, to overthrow our capitalist system, as opposed to relying on the spontaneity of loosely connected cells. You could also say they were gradually moving from a Quebec-centered approach to a more Canadian framework for the overall struggle to overthrow Canadian capitalism.

In Struggle, however, was *never* a party. It always considered itself as an organization that was struggling to bring about the conditions for a party that would have broad-based, working class support.

So within that organization that you mentioned, In Struggle, (which in French was known as En Lutte, and which went by both names because it was an organization across Canada) Charles was important both in founding and leading it through the 70s and into the early 80s. In 1982 that organization dissolved itself. Looking back retrospectively, how did Charles understand the failings of that endeavor to form a revolutionary workers party?

There were many contradictions at play within the organization, which was recognized by Charles. One of the contradictions was the little recruitment that the organization had managed to operate within the working class. Other contradictions included the connection between capitalism and patriarchy as major dominant systems of oppression, including contradictions with women's situation within the organization. However he was, I would say, deeply preoccupied with other short-comings of the organization which many activists did not necessarily see as he did. One of them is actually the fact that our own activism had prevented us from serious reflection on the question of revisionism. He was struck by and indeed waged a struggle within the organization on the blatant contradiction in our own ways of looking at the world: when it came to analyzing capitalism, looking at it fundamentally through its economic basis, and when it came to the short comings of the struggle for socialism in the USSR and other countries, looking at it only at the level of ideas and the aban-

donment of certain ideas and certain principles – as opposed to trying to understand the fundamental forces that were at play in the changes in those societies. So that was one of his major concerns. The other was humanism – the relation between Marxism and humanism – and an assessment of all the developments in science and in capitalism itself and how humanism could be updated through all of this and become a fundamental aspect of charting a course to advance the people's interest.

After 1982 with the dissolution of the project of In Struggle where did Charles focus his intellectual energies?

Just before answering your question on this, it's quite important to note that these were *extremely* difficult times for Charles Gagnon. After some decades of charting the course and leading two very different revolutionary organizations, the FLQ and then In Struggle, a deep sense of being abandoned, and possibly of personal failure to some extent, was quite present in his life. However, he did remain very active intellectually. He lived for two and a half years in Mexico and did some investigation into the Asian production mode in pre-capitalist societies. Then he came back to Quebec and wrote a doctorate thesis on the American new left. Then he started a major investigation which continued through to the end of his life, which he titled the "Crisis in Humanism", on which he was still working when he died. Actually a number of those later writings will soon be published as part of an anthology of his work.

We have focused a bit on the changes in Charles thinking. What would you identify as continuities in his perspective?

Well, a very persistent, constant search for a deep understanding of our world, of the lives that we're living in this world, and what is the fundamental course of human society presently. And a commitment to find through this analysis a way forward in the interest of people, of their well-being, of opposing the destruction and despair and the dehumanizing character of capitalism and eventually defeating it. I'd say that's the theme contribution that he's steadily working at, and making *important* contributions to, I'd say.

There certainly was a mood of warm affection for Charles, as a person, at the memorial evening, which I was very glad to have been a part of. What were his individual qualities that you think elicited this emotion?

To most activists Charles was not someone that they would be in contact with daily because of the way In Struggle, our organization, was shaped and set. So most people saw him as the leader of In Struggle, someone who definitely provided inspiration and orientation for their daily activist activities. But many people also had the chance of knowing Charles and testified as to his very noticeable warmth and kindness as a human being, his modesty – which was extremely striking – and the fact that he was really not judgmental: he saw all his comrades as human beings, →



*"What's he been doin'?"
"Overthrowin' the government"*

as struggling in the context of this capitalist society, and was very, very open to discussion about everything. One comrade who had the chance to live with Charles for a couple of years, who was a rank and file member of In Struggle and had no particular leadership role in the organization, told me at the commemoration that whenever he spoke with Charles, he had the sense that he was the only person in the world and that all Charles' attention was focused on him. And whenever people had differences of opinion with Charles, political opinions, he was always extremely open to hear their opinions, to think about them. And you could actually sense that. There weren't instant replies to whatever someone would tell him. He was thinking about what he had heard and was making his responses – I would say – in a measured way, always very respectfully.

His last published essay was addressed to youth. And one of the co-chairs of the memorial evening, along with you, was a young, anarchist-activist woman who only came to know Charles in the last five years. Why do you think Charles political journey ends with an address to youth?

I think he wanted very much to maintain a continuity between the past revolutionary struggles within Quebec and Canada, and what is going on presently. This 'Tale for the youth of my country', which is sort of a sub-title, is trying to present the FLQ and In Struggle, in a way, as youth movements, that these were young people, that they were like young people today. They were rebellious, they were energetic, wanted to challenge many things in the world, and that they did try to do this in persistent ways. It sort of depersonalizes that experience quite a lot and brings it to its general character. Charles also was of the opinion that changing the world was something that was predominantly resting on young peoples shoulders. And he ends his essay with that, saying that he has much more confidence in their ability to understand the world and challenge it than in some university intellectuals' convoluted ways of trying to present the complexity of our world. **R**

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PERSONAL MEMORIES by Mordecai Briemberg

There is an unusual experience, startling and yet strangely comforting. It's when a dear friend who has died appears before you, not in a dream but in daylight, not imagined but real.

I was at a recent film festival, one featuring documentaries of struggles in the global south, watching a film about the Mexican teachers. Suddenly in a scene of teachers meeting together I saw Charles in the face of one of the Mexicans. Exuding warmth, gentleness, attentively listening, not speaking except with the twinkle in his eyes. It was mere seconds, and Charles disappeared never to return in the remainder of the film.

I *knew* of Charles before I ever saw him. He was an "image" in those days when so many of us drew our optimism from the rising wave of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles around the globe. In remote Vancouver I situated Charles in that context of heroic liberation struggles. I initiated a Vallieres-Gagnon political prisoner committee working to gain popular support for their freedom.

On a few trips to Montreal, where Lise Waltzer was as caring a host as anyone could want, I *saw* Charles in the court room many months before I ever met him.

It was in that brief interlude between his FLQ imprisonment and his War Measures Act imprisonment that we first spent time together. Charles came to speak in

Vancouver, and stayed with my wife and I and our two very young children, whose well being he always asked after even in his last days, 35 years later.

Beginning in 1970 and through all the subsequent years of friendship and joint endeavors, Charles provided me with a deeper understanding of courage and character than I had drawn from the heroic "image" that first drew me to him.

An English playwright and radical activist, Harold Pinter, was awarded the 2005 Nobel Prize for literature. In his acceptance speech Pinter spoke of the pursuit of truth through dramatic art, which remains "forever elusive," indeed creating multiple and contradictory truths. Pinter contrasted this with the necessity for a citizen to define the "real truth of our lives and our societies." He argued, if a "fierce intellectual determination" to identify this real truth "is not embodied in our political vision we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us: the dignity of man."

In support of Pinter's view, I would add: without such political vision our voices are muffled – when they need to be heard clearly; our passions are stilled – when they need to be vibrant; our motion is frozen – when it needs to be focused; and our capacities to change the world are crippled – when they need to be enhanced.

For me the courage of Charles was just that: his fierce determination to embody in

a political vision the truth of our lives and our societies, for the purpose of securing the human dignity of people everywhere. And his courage, that neither needed nor wanted any bravado, encompassed the willingness to evaluate his own political vision no less critically than the political vision of others.

In one of my last conversations with Charles, here in Montreal at Notre Dame hospital, he commented with surprise at the warmth of some comrades who had been visiting with him, warmth he had not noticed in them earlier. Perhaps it was Charles who had missed observing these qualities before. Perhaps... but maybe it was the activism, the certainties that had suppressed those qualities in bygone years.

Yet, and this speaks to Charles' character, who could have failed to recognize his gentleness, his warmth, as much in his days of intense political activism as in his days of dying!

So listening, as we are this evening, to words that embody the courageous, fierce determination of Charles' pursuit of political vision, let us simultaneously enhance our own humanity by remembering Charles' kindness, his attentiveness to and caring for others, and the simple naturalness with which he conveyed respect to those who were fortunate enough to have encountered him. And remember too that bright twinkle of laughter in his eyes. **R**

THE LAST TESTIMONY by Marie-Jose Nadal

With this article, I will mostly let Charles Gagnon speak his own words in order to contribute to the spreading of the last reflections he wanted to make public before dying. This project, which should have taken the form of an introduction to the anthology of his works, was interrupted by illness. Hospitalised, he asked me to help with the recording of his thoughts: our conversations took place between October 17 and November 10, 2005. We agreed to revisit the most significant political periods of his life: his critical involvement in the FLQ of the 1960s; the radicalisation of his thinking, coming out of prison, which brings him to write *Pour le parti proletarian* [for the Proletarian Party], the founding document of the *In Struggle!* organisation. Concerning this organisation, Charles stressed the ideological limitations

which prevented a consistent critique of revisionism. From then on, distancing himself from left movements, who remained too weak to struggle against exploitation and inequalities, he pursued on his own a reflection on humanism which he had begun much earlier, during his pre-university studies: the human being, as well as individual and collective freedom, must be at the heart of political thought. Marxism must be a form of humanism. His work on *La Crise de l'humanisme* [The Crisis of Humanism] has taken the form of several unpublished manuscripts; let us hope that it soon will be made public.

In selected excerpts, the reader will notice that Gagnon's thinking remained challenging, holding surprises for many. A case →

in point is his position on power, which drew strong responses when the content of the interview was first revealed. This former Marxist-Leninist considers that power is not to be taken (neither by elections, nor by revolution). That it is by achieving concrete changes in the relations of production and in the social relations that the balance of forces will be changed in favour of greater justice and freedom. Charles liked to meet with youth organisations, and it is certainly through these encounters that he reached this conclusion.

Concerning the FLQ

Many writings of Charles Gagnon are witnesses to this period: his articles in *Révolution québécoise* [A journal begun by Charles Gagnon and Pierre Vallières in 1964] and his writings from prison, including *Feu sur l'Amérique* [Fire on America]. Already the ideological foundations of his thought can be found: anti-capitalism, anti-racism, anti-imperialism, class analysis – the struggle will be revolutionary and will unite all the oppressed (“the world class of the poor”, in his words). To struggle against capitalist dispossession, he suggests that power should be brought back to the level of work units or residence units: factory and neighbourhood committees will be the engines in the construction of a new society in a broad multinational liberation front. Forty years later, here is what Charles thought about the FLQ:

“For Vallières and me, it was primarily amidst workers’ and popular struggles that the FLQ should intervene, with the perspective of an independent and socialist Quebec.” [...]

“In practise, Vallières had the leading role, but I was not always an enthusiastic ‘follower’... ; for example, very quickly, I will strongly criticize his nationalism, since we had founded *Révolution québécoise* to move beyond the nationalism of *Parti pris*... We were never really in agreement concerning the importance of the national versus the social questions.” [...]

“For me, during the 1960s, the national question has to be the ground on which the social question should take form, since it draws many people’s attention around the world, not only in North America. [...] Since this question is on the agenda in so many places, why not join this movement, and transform it by uniting various – initially nationalist – struggle movements. I was thinking of the Black American struggles, the Native struggles, etc. ; it seemed to me that if we struggled together, if we coordinated our activities, we could merge all the dynamic elements of all those nations, struggling for a common objective. In the end, this is what I meant to say in *Feu sur l'Amérique*.” [...]

“Already, in *Feu sur l'Amérique*, I do not claim that violence is the key to success, but rather an instrument for mobilisation, which is a second ground of disagreement with Vallières, so that at the time of our release from prison, we no longer agreed on much. He wanted to see the rebirth of the FLQ, whereas for me the FLQ had to be all the *Québécois* taking up the struggle for their rights.” [...]

Pour le parti prolétarien (For the proletarian party)

Coming out of prison, Gagnon breaks with the FLQ in 1971; he writes *Pour le parti prolétarien*. With a small group of activists, he sets up l’*Équipe du journal* [The Newspaper Team], emphasizing the ideological struggle required to build the proletarian party. In his interview, he recalls the ideological breaks which led him to this view:

“In writing *Pour le parti prolétarien*, I broke away from the most obvious forms of spontaneism, such as the FLQ, the Black Panthers... all these movements drawn into direct action. Revolution reaches beyond revolt, it is a conscious, organised action, resting on identifiable bases and on the contradictions in society. On this ground, I moved from the national main contradiction to the main contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. I also differ with the Marxist tradition, because in the traditional communist parties, tradition really prevails over new ideas. Finally, I differentiate myself from theoreticians who want to renew Marxism, such as Althusser and those surrounding him. Not to mention the break with nationalism... As *Pour le parti prolétarien* is written, the *Parti Québécois* already exists, and I will criticize it as a movement serving the Quebec bourgeoisie, more than anything else.” [...]

In Struggle !

According to Charles Gagnon, the proletarian party will forge itself in the struggles of the working class. It will emerge from the action and determination of workers, not from the self-proclamation of young activists. Thus, ideological struggle is key to unite the proletariat under the banner of the socialist revolution, as well as to create the unity of the Marxist-Leninists of the world. *In Struggle!* was an organisation regrouped around a newspaper and two journals of national and international analysis, which tried to carry out the unification of communists in order to build a non-revisionist, proletarian, Marxist-Leninist, revolutionary party.

Charles Gagnon never renounced his commitment this project. But as he acknowledged several positive contributions of *In Struggle!*, he emphasized the ideological shortfalls which led to its dissolution. The following excerpts point to his ability to draw links between the crisis of his organisation and the weakness of the philosophical and political thinking of an entire period which renounced humanism and remained content with a superficial criticism of the traditional communist parties and the experiments in socialism of the 20th century.

“It would have seemed totally acceptable to me that *I.S.!* continue to exist for 10 more years without becoming a party. Because a party that cannot really act on the political scene, is a party on paper. With a constitution, with a programme, with a revolution charted in so many stages, unfolding like this or like that, perhaps... but if it carries no weight in the political decision making of the day, it is not a political force, it is not a party. The day an organisation is capable of influencing the powers that be, it can start thinking that it will eventually be able to get rid of them, one way or another.” [...]



A caricature of Gagnon and *In Struggle!* from a rival organization.

"We had honest intentions to renew Marxism: we proposed conferences to unite the Marxist-Leninists of Canada, inviting all organisations to debate in the open. We wanted to devise a Marxism for the end of the XXth century, here, and then around the world. With *International Forum*, we claimed a contribution to the evolution of the international M-L [Marxist-Leninist] movement, by inviting others to debate with us, without the discussion being dominated by the USSR, by China, or by anybody. The basic idea was: shouldn't young communists aim at sharing their thoughts? add up their respective contributions, regroup and merge them... to arrive at a communist line that would be valid for the current world. But this remained a project... I've always been proud to say that *I.S.!* never received a penny from a foreign party, most likely one of the rare such cases within the Western M-L movement." [...]

"I felt in a minority, and even if I remained an *In Struggle!* activist until the end, I had abandoned the leading role that com-

rades had bestowed upon me previously... because, in my view, we had dodged the fundamental problems. During the 1980s, it became very clear to me that we had dodged the fundamental debates of the 1940s and 1950s, especially in France. I then read again people like Malraux, Camus... For me, what had been evaded was the whole question of humanism... For me, marxism and humanism are interconnected. One cannot simply forget the importance of freedom for human beings, and for human societies." [...]

"Starting from [our] 3rd Congress, the question of revisionism became a central preoccupation, in my view. Our criticism of socialist or communist societies, or of the USSR, rested on ideology: there was revisionism because principles were abandoned... but as soon as we examined rural societies, or industrial capitalist societies, their mode of production was the decisive factor. In one case, it is the way production is organised which influences ideology... and in the other, it becomes the ideas that provide the framework to put a mode of organisation in place. Thus, if Russians fell into revisionism, it was because of their poor application of the principles... This line of reasoning no longer worked for me." [...]

"So as early as the 3rd Congress, I initiated a struggle on the question of revisionism. We had to revisit the past of the communist movement to try to understand its evolution, in ways other than the deviations of its leaders... But things accelerated, contradictions had developed within the organisation; some were questioning our positions and practise on patriarchy and women, others our weak rallying of workers, others the Stalinist rigidity of the organisation: democratic centralism was put into question. In other words, a certain number of real contradictions took over, but, in my view, they were masking the ideological disarray that was behind all this. Because with a broader, more mature, political view, we could have proceeded from *In Struggle!* to something else, we could have evolved without throwing everything out the window." [...]

The End of *In Struggle!*

After the dissolution of *In Struggle!*, Charles Gagnon did not belong to any other political organisation, but he remained in touch with some old comrades and some young activists. He continued a solitary and unfinished reflection, around the persistent doubts that he harboured. Here is how he summarized his latest preoccupations on the Quebec national question, on humanism, and on social change:

"We have not digested the weight of humanism on the thinking of our era. We refer to humanist concepts, but it all remains fuzzy. Faced with the realities of our times, we remain without answers... with the infinitely large, and the infinitely small, genetics, computer science... we are facing a universe which remains confusing to us. We say that we have a humanist thought, but it remains incomplete... not clearly formulated. How do we define a comfortable place for ourselves in the world? that's where a humanist thought resides." [...] →

“It is the end of In Struggle! which forced me to this reflection. Since I no longer belonged anywhere, I wanted to understand. True indeed, I found no place in society after the dissolution of In Struggle !...If I try to explain this exclusion, I think that the Québécois cannot accept the FLQ / ML combination. Those who have been activists in either of these two organisations managed to find a place: there are ex-FLQ deputy ministers, ex-MLs among MPs and MNAs [Members of the National Assembly of Quebec], and in the trade unions... but activists in both organisations... I do not think that the Québécois like that. It is too much deviance... I’m kidding... Even if my journey with separation nationalism was shortlived, I am still categorized as a nationalist that has deviated. I am bitter because of this rejection for being a bad nationalist... which I am. It is important to me to be a bad nationalist. I see no future in nationalism for Quebec. This has played very much against me.” [...]

“Here, in Quebec, we are stuck with the national question. Both of the currently most active left political forces (Union des Forces Progressistes and Option citoyenne [Both have recently merged to form a single party, *Québec Solidaire*]) – but I am speaking from the outside – are treating the national question in a very abstract fashion. But would we pay less taxes if Quebec was independent? Would we have more influence on cultural diversity in the world? Independence would mean being a small country among big ones, and the forces of world capital would not be changed by the arrival of a small independent country. On the contrary, I think that in some instances, Quebec’s position would be weaker than it is now... You don’t become independent to become strong. It is generally when one is strong that one becomes independent. In short, Quebec’s independence is not a solution, even if I have no problem with the notion of independence as such. Independence can be advocated, but it is not clear that it is desirable.” [...]

“Marxism remains an analysis of society which I find illuminating. Capitalism is bound to create rich and poor, and if we want more social justice, we have to struggle against capitalism. Marxism demonstrates that well. What I question, on the other hand, is the marxist-leninist orientation. The main error of In Struggle! was to cling so strongly to the principles of Lenin; because Marx spoke very little about the party. And parties are only made to take power.

“The more time passes, the more it seems to me that the notion of taking power is a delusion. You do not take power by elections or revolution. You do not take power, because it is a relation between two forces. It is the relation between the bourgeoisie, wealth, the control over the State apparatus, the control over the organisation of work, on one hand; and, on the other hand, the people who are controlled, those who work. That is the relation of forces which we must transform by building a social organisation of a new type.

“By dissociating from power in the way that we do things, in the way that we use new relations to exchange products, and for production... It is this new, emerging society, with its supporters

and artisans, that will be able to sufficiently chip away at the existing power and provoke some changes. When the benefits of these new relations will be perceived, when they will involve a larger number of people, we will then be able to speak of a political force that has the potential to lay the foundations of a new society. In this society, there will be individuals that will have changed to some extent, i.e. they will have abandoned the taste of power over others, of competition at all costs...

“Perhaps this is an idealist vision of things, but it seems to me that the experience of one century and a half of struggles for socialism shows that a power such as that of capitalism in its relation of domination over workers, such power is not one to be captured, even with the best weapons and all.” [...]

Conclusion

The presentation of these excerpts pays homage to an activist and a thinker who never renounced his convictions. All his life, he has defended the notion that the dignity of a human being can only be achieved by struggling against the injustices of the capitalist system. He belonged to various, even contradictory organisations, yet he always defending the unity of the most exploited, international solidarity and the necessary radical transformation of production and social relations. Some might be surprised by the final leanings of his political thought. This should be seen as the fruit of an analysis which tries to reach beyond the aborted criticism of revisionism and experiments in socialism, and to lay the foundations of a new humanism that leaves aside the thinking of the Enlightenment and fully sets itself in our contemporary world. Finally, internationalism remains a central feature of his thinking, be it when he was in touch with the Blacks Panthers or with African or Latin-American national liberation movements at the time of the FLQ, or when he proposed the unity of marxist-leninist organisations around the world. His involvement against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas shows that he did not forget, in his last years, to participate in a struggle that unites the left forces of the Americas.

Coming back to the last text that Charles Gagnon published, *Conte à l’adresse de la jeunesse de mon pays* [A Tale for the Youth of my Country], I will let him have the last word :

“This struggle still lies in front of us, in front of you. A struggle which I think only youth can engage in with enthusiasm, without hesitation. And when all is said and done, the enthusiasm of youth, yesterday’s just like today’s, suits me better than the capitulation and cynicism of many of my contemporaries with their selective memory, their polished – politically correct – language, their agreed upon meaningless discourse, masters of fastidious reasoning and platitudes...” **R**

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The Electoral Path & Voter Polarization in Latin America

Carlos Torres

Since the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998, the peaceful, electoral road to political transformation has become the broader left's new strategy across Latin America. The Bolivarian Revolution contributed to reopening a path that was attempted unsuccessfully by Joao Goulart in Brazil and Salvador Allende in Chile more than thirty years ago.

Brazil attracted the attention and curiosity of the intellectual left when Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva, a metalworker and leader of a new workers' party who had run for office a few times, was finally elected president of the largest country in South America. Before being elected for the first time, Lula and the Workers Party (PT) used to talk about democratic and pluralist socialism. But the PT's successful 2002 campaign included an alliance with the Liberal Party and their emphasis on socialism declined.

Those who saw the PT as a model for a new political left soon had their dreams tempered by the new government. With a feeble mandate and more hopes than detailed plans, the PT was elected to administer a country with large economic and social disparities by promising to reduce the growing gap in income distribution and to expand democratic participation. Neither succeeding nor failing, the PT had to compete on unfamiliar ground, working within the confines of capitalist laws and ultimately, like traditional parties, being accused of clientelism and corruption. The PT and Lula devoted their energies to managing Brazil in a Blairist; strengthening the neoliberal model and consolidating reformism.

PENDING LAND REFORM AND THE MST

However, Lula and the PT also committed themselves to reforms that, while primarily benefiting the ruling elites, also mitigated poverty in the large northern region of the country that had supported him with up to 70% of votes in the run-off election on October 29. The Zero Hunger campaign and the token land reform enacted in Lula's first mandate represents only a sample of a much-needed political undertaking to reduce the abyss between poor and rich in Brazil. With a minority parliament and cornered by a strong social democrat-liberal alliance in government, the PT hasn't been able to deal with land reform immediately. The MST, however, in spite of the timid and feeble PT reforms, did not hesitate in working to pressure Lula from the left to counter this right-wing offensive. What has been unmistakable is that Lula opted to govern within the existing framework, accepting the demands of international financial institutions and powerful Brazilian financiers. He has done little to push for changes and reforms

in this country that has remarkable concentrations of land and peasants without work.

SECOND MANDATE AND... PROSPECTS?

While the PT had to build a spurious alliance with the right to reach office, the MST, on the other hand, mobilized to build a much larger alliance - with other social movements such as the CUT, NGOs, homelessness organizations, Christian Base Communities, and others - to do what the PT would not. For Brazilian social organizations the aim is to build power from below to expand democratic participation. Furthering people's demands, Joao Pedro Stedile of the MST most recently affirmed that, "We will win the elections in spite of the PT and Lula's appalling electoral campaign." The intention is to continue developing, organizing and politically strengthening peoples' organizations while Lula is still in office in order to be able to challenge and eventually defeat neoliberals. The alternative, if Lula had lost the election, was for the social movements to confront state power, endure neoliberal anti-reforms and struggle to protect basic gains. With the Lula government they can instead expand and legitimize their presence and role as political actors. Moreover, if Lula had been defeated a new opening for the U.S. to renew its interference in Latin America politics would have been created.

There is some expectation is that with the people's support and the strength received on the second ballot, Lula will do what it takes to change course in his second mandate. This makes countering the neoliberal agenda, which is strong in the government's ranks, a high-priority task. Supporting the demands and advancement of social movements can generate confidence and strength in peoples' organizations to build a historical block for transformation with or without the PT - in other words, building a real alternative of the left.

The regional political context is also dynamic and encouraging for Lula and the PT, as well as for the social movements. In the past ten years social movements, new political actors and stronger alliances have begun to change the fate and face of Latin America. There is a larger and rooted progressive left emerging in every corner of the continent and unexpected developments are taking place, even in Mexico.

There, popular support and mobilization for López Obrador has changed the course of Mexican history in many ways. Mexico now faces a political and an institutional crisis from which →

the unexpected could emerge. The Zapatista uprising in 1994 and the current Oaxaca “Commune Resistance” indicates that the Mexican popular sectors are ready to break away from the frustrating institutional revolution to embark on a renewed democratic revolution.

THE EMPIRE..UNARMED?

There is, however, a reactionary political context defined by the hostility of the Empire, whose backyard is in rebellion against this transformation in the continent. The failure of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas has triggered more aggression. Threats and blackmail have become prominent features of White House policies for Latin America. But attacks against Venezuela and Bolivia, as well as pressure against Uruguay and Argentina, do not appear to be working. For the time being the weaponry operated by the Empire lies in bilateral free trade agreements and economic pressures. Military intimidation, although active, currently has a more subtle role.

There is a conflicting duality to this context. As the former Brazilian Neves put it long time ago, “in politics what matters is not the facts but their interpretation.” The U.S. is not willing to give up Latin America and is eager to use its power to counter the proliferation of democratic revolutions as they did in the past. The Brazilian political scientist Maria Helena Moreira claims that, “now that the cold war is over the U.S. justifies its intrusion on the pretext of the axis of evil.” The old specter of the cold war is being replaced or combined with new psychological devices to contain a growing, plural and diverse process unleashed beyond the Rio Grande.

Conversely, the progressive and social left has also learned that the struggle for a better society or a different world rests both in political pluralism and social transformation. The age of the one-party system is fading away and a new political culture, more democratic and inclusive, is emerging in most of the refreshing anti-neoliberal projects. The right-wing sectors are defending their only way out, furthering their interests by contriving more innovative or humanized forms of neoliberalism.

THE ANDEAN REGION AND THE ECUADORIAN RE-AWAKENING

In Ecuador a well-to-do candidate attempted for the third time to win the last presidential election. The Banana magnate, Alvaro Noboa, who represents the agricultural export sector, received 26% of the votes. Noboa is a loyal associate of the United States; owns more than 120 companies in Ecuador; is an unrepentant anticommunist; and a cold war warrior who sees his opponents in the shadow of Chávez.

On the other side of the equation, Rafael Correa received 23% of the ballots cast in the October election. Correa managed to position his candidacy away from the traditional political parties and aboriginal organizations, whose candidate received a meager 2.12% of the vote. This outcome reflects the fragmentation of the left.

Rafael Correa is an economist who – in a previous government endorsed by the left and the native organizations – as Minister of Finance endured attacks from right and left, but mostly from the IMF and the World Bank. As a leftist nationalist, he stated not long ago that President Chavez’s speech at the U.N. “was insulting the devil.” Promoting Latin American integration with Chávez, Evo Morales, Lula and others, Correa wants to renegotiate contracts with international corporations. Most contracts would be renegotiated in the gas and oil sector since these companies appropriate eight of every ten barrels of oil produced and exported. Correa’s approach to the free trade agreement with the USA, to Plan Colombia and the military base in the Manta region of Ecuador is similar. A South-South orientation would be the foundation of his economic policies.

In the runoff, Correa already counts on the support of the left, the indigenous coalitions rallying around him, social and popular organizations, and intellectuals. These groups, however, are not willing to endorse Correa’s program 100% and are ready to provide critical support and pressure to enact a more democratic and progressive government. Again, peoples’ organizations want to wait and see, but mostly they want to build their own strength and power in order to negotiate programs, participation, policies and support.



In popular culture, U.S. aggression against the Sandinista government gave rise to a famous Clash record and the celebrity of Oliver North.

THE RESURGENCE OF THE SANDINISTAS!

In Central America, the Sandinistas are trying to make a triumphant comeback. Daniel Ortega, the embattled revolutionary commander, will most likely win the November 5th election in the first round of voting, but divisions in the FSLN may force him to form a coalition with the MRS. The MRS is the Sandinista Renovation Movement, which, unlike Ortega, counts on only 14% of voter support against the former President who could attain up to 35% of voter preference. The problem is that Ortega built an alliance with both the hierarchy of the church and the former Contras, whose leader is the candidate for the Vice-Presidency. The Sandinistas are promising a new and more democratic move toward governance that respects religion, democratic institutions and free markets, but is opposed to U.S. dominance. The shift toward Latin American integration is also in the Sandinistas' program.

Once again in Nicaragua, the U.S. is demonizing the FSLN and warning Nicaraguans of the effects of another Sandinista government. Recently, while visiting Managua, former Colonel Oliver North, a key participant in the Contra-Iran affair, declared that if Ortega was elected U.S. aid and other programs would be at stake.

IS THE LEFT BACK?

Should another Sandinista government be elected in Nicaragua, the political map of Central America could easily shift to the left. That the FMLN in El Salvador has come close to reaching office a couple of times since the end of the revolutionary war in that country blows more wind in the sails of the Central American left.

So the left is making a strong comeback both in Central America and the Andean region. Although it is true that this is not the same left of the 1970s and 1980s, this left has learned from defeats in war, it is more pluralist, democratic and genuinely in favor of Latin American integration.

For the first time in history the Empire has been confronted, denounced and questioned, even taunted, in multiple forms. In Quebec City during 2001, President Chavez solitarily rejected the signing of the FTAA for 2005. Last November at the People's Summit in Argentina, President Kirchner challenged G.W. Bush by saying that either the US could continue to be part the problem or it

could become part of the solution. The FTTA was scrapped and Bush and his allies had to swallow that bitter pill – Chavez was no longer alone. The President of Cuba has warned countless times that U.S. arrogance and Bush's stupidity was not "good neighbour" policy. And, only a few days ago, the UN General Assembly witnessed the most open defiance to the Empire's aggressions around the world when President Chavez observed that the Devil had delivered a speech in that meeting.

Organized in traditional political parties, the partisan left will need to find a place in this process and become part of the solution, rather than part of the problem as it has so often been. As witnessed in every electoral contest, the partisan left arrives at the ballot box fragmented and unfriendly, competing for voters and pressuring social movements. Between elections, mobilization for the most part relies on the capacity of social movements to mount an offensive.



As usual, the left just can't agree: devil or vampire?

The new wind blowing transformation across Latin America is creating conditions for the emergence of new social and political forces; from aboriginal organizations in the Andean region to peasants' unions and urban organizers reclaiming full citizenship; from Mexico to Bolivia new actors and new tactics are at work. Even in forgotten Chile, hesitant social movements have begun to re-emerge.

In all, it can be said that we are witnessing the most remarkable political transition ever in Latin America. If we assess history, we can also conclude that never before have political and social transformations been taken so seriously. The right is confronted with the dilemma of either contributing to develop freer and democratic societies, redistributing wealth and being part of the 'integrationist' project, or of being cast aside and left behind. The

U.S. could establish a considerate relationship and mutually beneficial trade and commerce with the region or attempt new bloody aggressions that presently could only serve to strengthen integrationist sentiment. The transition towards new paradigms will be long, and it appears that there are no shortcuts. For now, the struggle on the field of representative and parliamentary democracy coupled with social mobilization seems to be the way out of the neoliberal project. **R**

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Cold War Rivalries and the Kurdish Nationalist Movements

Khashayar Hooshiyar

Since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, there has been an uninterrupted imperial presence in the Middle East, mainly due to its strategic geopolitical position and resources, oil in particular. In the Middle East, control of natural resources has been centuries-old politics. Since oil has formed a backbone to the economic growth and wealth of many nations, control of those resources has been paramount in the foreign policy of superpowers. Powerful geopolitical interests in the Middle East pursued through colonial and neo-colonial policies while benefiting superpowers and their class allies in the region, has been a major factor in plunging the countries and inhabitants of the region into all kinds of divisions, wars, poverty, underdevelopment, backwardness and dictatorships. The Kurds are perhaps the most oppressed ethnic group in the region and have suffered the most as a result of these policies. They are the only stateless nation that throughout the modern history of the Middle East have been subject to campaigns of oppression, double standards, and ethnic cleansing because of its claim to self-rule and statehood which have been contrary to the interests of both imperial powers and their puppet regimes in the region.

Denied a country in the post-World War I division of the Ottoman Empire, Kurds were briefly promised a country by President Woodrow Wilson, but then were left out in the cold as the former colonial powers (France and Britain) drew up artificial boundaries for their future neo-colonial exploitation of the region's resources and labour. The Kurds remained stateless "minorities" in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Armenia.

During the cold war, the ideological and military rivalries between the Soviet Union and the United States for global influence and domination - manifested in the

preservation of status quo through such mechanisms as balance of power and the division of the world into specific sphere of influence - provided the main "justification" for the oppression of the growing Kurdish nationalist aspiration and movements. However, preserving the status quo did not mean these states wouldn't take advantages of Kurdish nationalism and the strong resistance to assimilation when circumstances necessitated - the old colonial policy of divide and rule. So far as U.S. and European foreign policy are concerned, this is clearly evident in their treatment of the Kurdish struggle in Iran and Iraq.

In Iran, for instance, when Reza Pahlavi seized power in 1925 and established an authoritarian regime, his regime ignored the ethnic diversity of Iranian society. As far as the Kurds were concerned, Pahlavi's nation-building strategy was based on the conviction that Kurds did not exist as a distinct 'people.' However, since the Kurds' existence as a distinct people proved very difficult to deny, the strategy shifted to the assimilation of the Kurds into the dominant Persian culture - Persianization of the Kurds - by suppressing their linguistic and cultural identity. The Shah's power was built on a strong British, and then U.S.-backed, military and secret police; therefore, it was very successful in implementing its repressive policy towards the Kurds without any international objection. After Reza Shah's abdication, in the more open political and tolerant conditions created between 1941 and the overthrow of the nationalist government of Dr. Mosaddeq, the Azerbaijanis and Kurds succeeded in establishing their first autonomous governments. However, the official notion of a nation-building strategy was pursued. As a result the Shah, having maintained the support of the United States and Britain, succeeded

in crushing the Kurdistan Republic that had been declared in Mahabad in 1946. The Pahlavi Regime continued its repressive policy towards the Kurds until its fall in 1979.

In Iraq, when the Ba'ath party - which was removed from government soon after the 1963 coup - returned to power in a 1968 coup, they signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union. Soon after, in 1972, the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) was nationalized. The Iraqi government turned to Moscow for both weapons and help in deterring any U.S. reprisals for nationalizing the IPC, which had been owned by Royal Dutch-Shell, BP, Exxon, Mobil, and the French firm CFP. Iraq was the first Gulf country to successfully nationalize its oil industry during the early 1970s struggles of oil exporting countries against the Western multinational corporations that had ruled the industry. By shunning the western powers and developing a close relationship with the Soviet Union, Iraq succeeded in depriving U.S. and U.K. companies from having access to lucrative Iraqi oil resources. Before the nationalization of oil in Iraq, U.S. and U.K. oil giants held a three quarter share of the Iraqi petroleum company, which included Iraq's entire national reserves.

This coincided with the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq and Iraq's low-scale military conflict with Iran over the location of border lines. To punish and put pressure on the Ba'ath regime, the U.S. government originally supported the Kurdish rebels. However, as Iran reached an agreement with Iraq in 1975 and the Ba'ath regime moderated its relationship with the U.S., Washington and its ally, the Shah, withdrew their support for the rebels; hence, allowing the Iraqi government to slaughter the Kurds. In fact, the U.S. even denied them refuge. No wonder Kissinger secretly ex-

plains that, “covert action should not be confused with missionary work.” We witnessed the same scenario in the 1991 Gulf War during which Washington originally encouraged the Kurds to stand up against Saddam when he invaded Kuwait, but later left them alone to be repressed by Saddam.

A 1995 CIA report, however, tells us what exactly the U.S. policy has been with respect to the Kurdish cause. Simply because the Kurds seemed to resist assimilation and had been struggling for their right to self-determination, the CIA Report calls Kurdish nationalism “an even more intractable problem than Palestinian nationalism,” and claims that “Kurdistan is and doubtless will remain a non-state nation.” It is based on this that Washington’s

tent of denying atrocities and genocide in these countries until, in the case of Iraq, Hussein made the transition from ally to enemy, at which point it not only became possible, but necessary to appeal to Kurdish suffering there.

Another important aspect of the impact of the Cold War on Kurdish nationalism was the growth of Kurdish political parties and the escalation of their resistance against local national governments. The rivalries between big superpowers of the east and west provided a breathing space and, on occasion, ideological and logistical supports from both capitalist and communist camps when their immediate interest were involved. It was under such circumstances that, for example in Turkey,

when its pro-Western, British-installed monarchy was overthrown in 1953 – the first puppet regime to be overthrown in an oil-producing country. In July 1958 an army faction led by Abdul Karim Qasim seized power in Iraq, executed the king and declared Iraq a republic. Fearing that Iraq might turn communist under the new military regime and worrying about its oil interests, the United States delivered an ultimatum to the new regime by threatening to invade Iraq. In order to corroborate the credibility of its threat, the U.S. stationed its troops in Jordan and Lebanon and did not pull them back until it received assurances from the new regime in Baghdad that U.S. oil interests will not be jeopardized.

But the anti-colonial sentiments of the Iraqi people and their high expectations from the new government, posed a growing danger to U.S. interests in Iraq. Under a rising tide of public pressure, Qasim’s regime undertook several anti-imperialist measures contrary to its previous assurances. The most important of such policies were: limiting IPCs concession area by issuing “law 80” in 1961 and the subsequent formation of a new Iraqi owned oil company in 1963; withdrawing Iraq from the Baghdad Pact; ordering British forces out of Iraq; signing an economic and technical aid deal with the Soviet Union; and cancelling the American aid program. These measures proved detrimental not only to the U.S. interests in Iraq, but also to Qasim’s own regime.

The Kurds of northern Iraq – led by Mustafa Barzani, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party which was established in Tehran in December 1945 – took advantage of the situation and revolted against the government of Abdul Karim Qasim in 1961. Iraq managed to put down the Kurdish revolt, but fighting between the Iraqi government and the Kurds continued for decades. In fact, in 1975, the KDP attacked Iraqi troops after the government refused to give them autonomy and control of the oil-rich province of Kirkuk, which was traditionally Kurdish territory. Baghdad’s failure to grant autonomy made Barzani increasingly receptive to U.S., Israeli and Iranian offers of support if the KDP took up arms against the Iraqi regime. In 1974, Baghdad unilaterally announced a Kurdish autonomous region on its terms and launched a military →



policy in general has been either to fully support or, at least, turn a blind eye on the repression of Kurdish nationalism by its client regimes in the Middle East. The Kurds have been subjected to horrible repression, countless human rights abuses, and genocide not only in Iraq, Iran, and Syria, but also in Turkey – and the world community has been largely unable to intervene because this was seen as the “sovereign affairs of other nations.” This at least has been the case when those nations were U.S. allies, such as Iran, under the Shah, Iraq in the 1980s, and Turkey all along. The U.S. has even gone to the ex-

Abdullah Ocalan and his circle helped create The Kurdish Workers Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan – PKK) in the late 70s to seek Kurdish independence from the Turkish state. The PKK was the strongest and most organized Kurdish revolutionary organization with Marxist-Leninist tendencies for several years, representing a large portion of the Kurdish masses.

In Iraq, the circumstances leading to the 1961 uprising of the Kurds against the government in Iraq was largely the product of the superpower rivalries. After Iran, Iraq was the second country that became the target of direct U.S. imperial policy

offensive. When Tehran and Washington abruptly ended support for the KDP in March 1975, following an agreement between Baghdad and Tehran, Barzani announced the collapse of the armed struggle. In the absence of any plan for retreat, thousands of Kurdish guerrillas surrendered to Iraqi forces, while 100,000 to 200,000 guerrillas and their families and supporters fled, mostly into Iran. The government, managed to crush the revolt after Iran and Iraq signed the infamous Algiers Accord. Iran and the U.S. cut off support for the Kurdish revolt, leading to the routing of Kurdish areas within a week - 800 villages along the Iran-Iraq border were evacuated. The collapse of the Kurdish resistance in March 1975 presented a moment of profound crisis for the people of Iraqi Kurdistan, throwing their forces and the Kurdish community in disarray.

Following the failure of the KDP movement, in 1975 Jalal Talabani, a member of the KDP's political bureau, broke away from Mustafa Barzani's leadership and formed a "Leninist" opposition group, later came to be known as Yekiaiti Nishtimani Kurdistan (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan - PUK). The PUK incorporated some dissatisfied KDP members and non-KDP groupings such as the Komala of Nawshirwan Mustafa and Socialist Movement of Kurdistan of 'Ali Askari. The PUK was originally based in Damascus (supported by the Soviets) and aligned itself closely with the Syrian government who trained and armed them. Syria's objective in supporting the rebels was to combat Iraq's regional dominance after the Algiers agreement.

In 1976, Talebani began organizing armed resistance inside Iraq. The establishment of the PUK was the beginning of the decades of conflict between KDP and PUK. But the sole beneficiaries of this conflict were the regional and global powers, not the Kurdish masses. Despite their bitter rivalry, the KDP and PUK have long followed the same strategy. They have built up substantial armed militias to advance their objectives while looking to Iraq's regional competitors and international enemies for support. Unfortunately, in many occasions, they failed to pursue independent political strategy and became the object of imperialist plans and policies, resulting in the sufferings of the Kurdish people.

The history of Iraqi Kurdistan shows how imperialist powers and their local clients have used the warring factions of the Kurdish elite for their own ends at the expense of the impoverished Kurdish masses.

The period after 1975 was one of heavy repression. Iraqi forces destroyed hundreds of villages in order to create a "security belt" along the borders with Iran, Turkey and Syria. The village inhabitants were resettled in camps in southern and less mountainous areas. Baghdad also bought support by distributing some of its rising oil revenues, although productive investments were channelled to center and south of the country. With the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980, both regimes tried to use the Kurds against each other. Baghdad stepped up its military recruitment. In the north, new lightly-armed militias were recruited, which Kurds referred to as *jahsh* (little donkeys). Traditional clan leaders headed these militias. The PUK, in reaction to the KDP's joint operation with the Iranian government in 1983 at Hajj Umran, opened talks with the Iraqi government on the question of autonomy. These talks collapsed in January 1985 due to disagreement over the area of the autonomous region. In response, the PUK launched its major insurrection against the Ba'ath government, drawing on Iranian support. It signed a cooperation agreement with Iran in October 1986, vowing to fight together until the overthrow of the Ba'ath government. This resulted in the PUK being designated as

Zumrat Umala' Iran (Band of Iranian Agents).

Differences of ideology and political practice as well as conflicting group interests produced periods of heavy clashes between the PUK and the KDP. At Iran's initiative the two groups came together as the Kurdistan Front in July 1987, just prior to Baghdad's genocidal Anfal campaign of 1987 and 1988, which resulted in the Kurdish movement being cut once again adrift and Jalal Talebani forced to flee to Iran. Of course, Iran's interest in the Kurdish cause in Iraq was not only purely self-centred and tactical but also hypocritical considering the degree of the repression of the Kurdish community in Iran. The history of Iraqi Kurdistan shows how imperialist powers and their local clients have used the warring factions of the Kurdish elite for their own ends at the expense of the impoverished Kurdish masses.

The Kurdish movements in Iran and Turkey were partly overshadowed by the 1961-75 struggles in Iraq. Although the armed resistance in Iraq initially contributed to the revival the KDP in Iran (KDPI), Barzani argued that Kurds in Iran should delay their struggles until the Iraqi Kurds had achieved meaningful autonomy in Iraq. Barzani's position, however, was more aimed at gaining the support of the Iranian regime than concern for the plight of the Kurds in Iran. In fact, he ordered those Iranian Kurdish activists who had escaped the repression of the Shah from Iran to stop anti-Iranian activity. One faction of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) followed Barzani, but a group of activists split from the main group to form the KDPI Revolutionary Committee. They staged an armed struggle against the military forces of the Shah, but were eventually defeated when Barzani closed the borders while they were trying to take refuge in Iraq. The rest of KDPI leadership remained in Baghdad and Europe until the Pahlavi monarchy was on the verge of collapse in late 1978.

This by no means was the end of Kurdish resistance in Iran. In 1969, a group of radical intellectuals formed the Revolutionary Organization of Toilers of Kurdistan, better known as Komala. Since they faced severe repression under the Shah's regime, like other radical opposition forces they had to go underground. Reject-

ing both pro-Soviet tendencies and the urban guerrilla emphasis of some Iranian revolutionary groups, Komala followed the Maoist strategy of organizing and mobilizing the peasants against the Shah. The KDPI denounced the Komala's activities to organize the peasantry and recruit women, arguing that issues of class struggle should await the achievement of autonomy. The KDPI began armed assaults on the leftists groups as early as 1980, and in 1984 launched a confrontation against Komala that continued for several years and took a heavy toll on both sides. The KDPI has since been weakened by the assassination of two general secretaries. Since 1984, the leadership and much of the organization of both parties have been based in Iraqi Kurdistan. As in Iraq, factionalism came to be the main impediment to the emergence of a viable Kurdish nationalist movement.

In Turkey, in response to the Kemalist regime's westernization policy aimed at building a pro-western secular nation based on Turkish national, linguistic and cultural identity, the Kurds launched a series of revolts throughout the 1920s and 1930s. These revolts were total failures mainly due to organizational problems. By 1939, the Turkish regime managed to brutally put down the last of these revolts, leading many to believe that the Kurdish *problem* had been "solved." Hundreds of thousands of Kurds were forcibly deported to Western Turkey. The repression and proliferation of Kurdish cultural and political groups continued even in the period between the military coups of 1960 and 1980, directly and indirectly supported by the west. Turkish repressive policy toward the Kurdish masses, however, created a favourable condition for the emergence of radical organizations espousing socialism, unlike Iraqi Kurdistan. The military regime following the 1980 coup was able to suppress most of these organizations with the exception of the PKK. It survived the repression following the 1980 coup mainly due to its strong social networks and organizational discipline. The PKK launched its first attack against Turkish military targets in 1984. During the 80s, the PKK was distinguished from other political parties by its vast social base, which included a sizable portion of workers and peasants. Unlike its counterparts in Iran and Iraq that

advocated autonomy for Kurdish regions and were more involved in making deals with their respective governments or their enemies than developing their organizations and social base, the PKK advocated both socialism and independence for greater Kurdistan, and put a priority on armed struggle. The PKK, furthermore, has been open to women's participation and it was estimated to have thousands of women in its ranks during the 80s. Another important factor helping the organization win popular support in Kurdish areas was its ability to sustain a campaign of armed struggle against the well-armed Turkish army. Although it benefited from some foreign aid, in particular from Syria, it effectively relied on the organizational support of the Kurds in Kurdistan and in diaspora.

During the Cold War, the Kurds of Iran, Iraq and Turkey were subjected to systematic repression, ethnic cleansing and racist practices. Global systemic pressures and imperialist policies aimed at the integration of Third World economies, including the Middle East, into the dominant global capitalist system forced client regimes in the Middle East to pursue capitalist modernization, cultural homogenization, and political stability. To achieve these objectives, these client regimes undertook substantial infrastructural reforms while maintaining a rigid and authoritarian political system. Ethnic minorities and political opposition groups who resisted these

changes paid the highest price. Kurds, in particular because of their nationalist aspirations and their strong resistance to incorporation into the dominant culture, were systematically oppressed. In response, many Kurdish political organization were formed, who embarked on decades of armed struggle against their oppressors.

The opening created as a result of the rivalries between the Soviet Union and the United States for supremacy in the region was an important factor in the survival and growth of these groups. Like the PLO, many radical Kurdish organizations relied on political and military support from the Soviet Union to sustain their existence and continue their struggles. In addition, the "socialist camp" provided them with much-needed ideological blueprints, organizational assistance and strategic guidance. These rivalries had a downside too. Labeling these organizations as communist and pro-Soviet provided the United States and their client regimes with a "proper" justification to repress the Kurdish masses as a whole. In addition, lack of political insights, sectarian interests, and a mere pursuance of power pushed Kurdish organizations such as PUK and KDP to naively and vainly look to Iraq's regional competitors and international enemies for support. **R**

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