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RELAY

A SOCIALIST PROJECT REVIEW



CHILD CARE POLITICS
QUEBEC • MINIMUM WAGE CAMPAIGN
BEYOND KYOTO • AFGHANISTAN



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

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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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The Politics of Child Care

Morna Ballantyne

Think for a minute not about child care but about kindergarten. Available to all children, it offers good quality, is inclusive of diverse needs and is paid for out of the public purse. It is delivered by highly qualified, unionized and fairly compensated teachers, and while the staff to student ratios aren't good enough, they are getting better.

Kindergarten is well accepted. Over 95% of eligible children attend it even though it is voluntary in most provinces. You don't hear parents say they would rather receive money instead of the service; you don't hear governments saying that kindergarten services should be replaced with a kindergarten allowance; you don't hear arguments that kindergarten may be good for city-kids but doesn't work for rural families; and you don't see governments leaving kindergarten to chance; they invest in it, in a systematic and comprehensive way.

People overwhelmingly believe that kindergarten is good for all kids - not just kids of lower-income families; not just kids of mothers who work outside of the home. It is accepted that kindergarten is educational, that it helps children develop, that it is a public good and necessary for social and economic development.

So, why can't we think of child care in the same way? Isn't it time - past time - that younger children also have access to programs that are:

- Well-resourced
- Widely available
- Affordable

All the evidence and research on child development supports this view. It is the approach used in Europe; Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Denmark, Italy, Sweden, Germany: all provide quality child care services to over 90 per cent of children between the ages of three and six. And children under the age of three also have access to substantial child care services. On the other hand, Canada, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), is in last place of twenty countries for services to three to six year-olds.

So, why is it that in Canada, with the exception of Quebec, we have no real system of early learning and child care? How is it that fewer than 20% of Canadian children under the age of three have access to regulated care, and for three to six year olds, coverage is less than 30%? How is it that early-learning programs for children with special needs are almost non-existent - as they are for francophone children outside of Quebec.

Why is our record so abysmal? It is not because Canadian

families and children don't have as great a need. Two out of three mothers with children under the age of three are in the paid work force. Three of four mothers with children aged three to five work outside of the home. It is an interesting fact that even without a child care system, 80% of children aged three to five receive some form of non-parental care.

What is at issue is the kind of care they receive; its quality, its cost and who is paying for it. These questions have to do with two things: money and politics. On the *money* side, consider this. Canada invests less in early childhood education services than any of the industrialized countries studied by the OECD. Canada spends only 0.25% of our gross domestic product (GDP) on early learning and care. In contrast, Denmark spends 2% of its GDP. Even the US spends more than twice what Canada does relative to its GDP. With such a small public investment in early learning and care, is it any wonder that our system is so inadequate? Who picks up the slack? Children do, so do those who provide the services and so do parents.

But the costs of not investing in early learning and care go



beyond those of us who are in immediate need or who work in the system. In 1998, Professors Michael Krashinsky and Gordon Cleveland did a cost-benefit study on child care and concluded that if good quality early learning and child care services were made available to every child in Canada two to five years of age, the incremental cost would be significant – over \$5 billion a year. But the benefits would be twice as great as the costs. For *every* one dollar spent, the economic benefit would be *two* dollars. Half of those benefits would go to the child... better language skills, fewer problems in school, with better outcomes throughout life. And half the benefits would go to families and society because when parents have access to child care they improve their employment experiences and their earnings. And when earnings improve, tax revenues for government increase and we all benefit.

But maybe the problem is that Canada has no money for the initial investment in child care. Except that, the same OECD study that shows Canada in *last* place when it comes to investment in child care services shows Canada in *fourth* place when it comes to wealth.

The problem isn't lack of money. It is that governments have *chosen* not to invest and the federal Conservative government is the greatest offender. As we all know, the January 2006 election changed the course of child care history – once again. At his first media conference, moments after being sworn in as Prime Minister, Stephen Harper announced the unilateral cancellation of the federal-provincial child care agreements – agreements that would have transferred \$5.2 billion to the provinces and territories for child care – without consultation with the provinces or territories or even Parliament.

In place of the agreements, the Conservatives gave us something they called the child care allowance, an allowance that doesn't have anything to do with child care. It is a token payment of \$100 a month for every child under the age of six. Of course that's \$100 before taxes. It's not enough to pay for child care. Nor does it make more child care available. It doesn't enhance quality of programs and it won't raise the poverty wages earned by child care staff. That the federal Conservatives call this \$100 scheme universal child care is one of the best examples of political spin ever.

But the Conservative government didn't stop there. It also promised a Child Care Spaces Initiative: \$250 million a year in tax breaks to businesses to help create 125,000 spaces over the next five years, but not to fund their ongoing operation. Even the government has recognized that this approach is doomed.

The \$250 million is now going to take the form of transfers to the provinces and territories instead of tax credits. If you are thinking this is good news, think again.

The \$250 million might be in the recent budget as transfers. But the \$1.2 billion for child care that used to be there is gone. Further, there will likely be no conditions attached to the \$250

million transfer. No requirement to spend it on quality, regulated care. Maybe not even a requirement to spend it on child care at all. We know from bitter past experience that when money gets transferred to the provinces without any accountability and any conditions, the money ends up being spent on anything but child care.

What can we do? First, we need to think big and bold. We need to do better than demand the reinstatement of the federal-provincial agreements on child care. The Liberal agreements were never about building a universal not-for-profit quality child care system. They were more about helping the provinces expand the current patchwork approach to child care. What we want and need is a new universal social program: a program that entitles every child from ages 0 to 12 access to an affordable early learning and child care program, outside of school hours; a social program that is required by law to be not-for-profit, that is high quality and inclusive. This means ensuring high wages, good working conditions and training programs for the staff; and it means fostering a progressive, developmental approach to learning.

And – here is something new – we want the federal government to start with children three to five years old. Under our proposal, the federal government would transfer an additional \$1.2 billion to the provinces and territories each year. By the end of the fourth year, there would be enough money to finance a space for every three to five year old. Adding another \$1.2 billion every year after that would grow the system sufficiently to give access to all children from birth to age 12 in about ten years time.

It is a bold plan. But it is a simple plan. It is a plan that Canadians can get excited about. It's a plan that will make a concrete and meaningful difference. And by starting with a program for three to five year olds we can give Canadians a taste of what is meant by universal and developmental early learning and care. Once Canadians experience it, the political pressure for more and better child care will grow. Just like Medicare, once Canadians taste it, they will be hooked and fight hard to keep it.

Code Blue is taking this plan across the country to build support, community by community. Starting next month, we're taking early learning and child care on tour.

We'll hold public meetings. We'll speak to the media, to women, and to community leaders. We will build momentum for a child care system. And we will work to use that momentum to help defeat Stephen Harper's Conservative policies in the next election. We are putting forward a positive vision of what is possible. But we are also going to get more militant in exposing the damage Stephen Harper is doing.

We know that Canadian parents are frustrated and angry. They are filing their tax returns and finding out they have to repay a good chunk of the so-called child care allowance. They are finding out that high-income families with a stay-at-home parent ends up with more government support than a lower-income family →

with parents in the workforce. They are realizing that Harper's claim of universal child care is a sham. One year has passed since Harper was elected and families have less access to affordable care - and that's without taking into account the \$1.2 billion cut that comes into effect a few weeks from now. Parents now know they did not get universal child care and they did not get choice.

We are going to turn that anger into a significant force. Last month, parents and child care workers in BC occupied centres to protest their closing. They spilled to the street in large and small communities to express their outrage. Code Blue is working to spread that sense of militancy and urgency across the country. Starting on March 30th and 31st, on the eve of the Conservative's second budget, and on the eve of the \$1.2 billion cut to child care, we will be in the streets and on the road for child care.

Children and parents, particularly mothers, are in crisis when it comes to child care. It's time for those in power to feel the same kind of pressure. We're aiming to help defeat the Conservatives in the next election. We're aiming to pressure the next government to build early learning and child care as a social entitlement. And we're aiming to pressure the provincial governments to follow through on delivery.

Many of us have worked years and years advocating for a national child care program. We have devoted thousands of hours to building the best quality programs we can with virtually no government support. We are tired but we are not demoralized. Frustrated, yes. Angry, for sure. But we have not lost hope. We have made huge progress. We have researched, we know the facts, we have the arguments and we are better organized than ever. Our Code Blue campaign is the biggest and broadest coalition for child care yet. We draw hope from the fact that every political party now talks about child care – provincially and federally. We draw hope and inspiration from the overwhelming majority of Canadians who want and believe in early learning and child care.

We know that every social program, every entitlement we have today, was won through years of struggle. There were advances and setbacks but eventually the programs were won. And so too can we win child care – as a new social program, a new right, a new entitlement, the first social program since Medicare. It will be the best legacy we can leave to our children, our grandchildren and future generations. With your help we will win. **R**

Morna Ballantyne works at the CUPE National Office in Ottawa.

Doing Child Care

Shellie Bird

I have worked in child care for 26 years and have always said that I am a trade union and child care activist by necessity and a child care worker by trade. When I took up this career I did not realize that advocacy and fighting for better wages, benefits and working conditions were a requirement of the job!

I hope to paint a picture of what working in child care is all about – I want to go beyond the research, the reports, statistics and arguments, to give you a flavour of what motivates child care workers into the field, what keeps us and compels us to fight for a national child care program.

CARING WORK

There is nothing quite like sharing the wide-eyed wonder of an 18 month old, watching a furry caterpillar creep across the trunk of a tree, or finding a worm on the side walk and learning about its feel, its smell (sometimes tastes) or how its tail curls-up when held gingerly (and sometimes not) between the chubby little fingers of

a 2 year old. It elicits in some peals of laughter and in other squeals of disgust.

There is nothing as satisfying as listening to the wise and compelling observations of a preschooler about what they need and why something isn't fair. Or sharing in the subtle... wry humour of a toddler... not yet learned in the pooh-pooh/cac-cac humour of a 3 year old. Or sharing the unrestrained joy and sense of accomplishment when a toddler gets their arms into their coat and flips it over their head and waits proudly for just a little help with the zipper! I consider it a privilege to share in their learning and their lives – to take part in the relationship children are always willing to offer.

At the risk of boasting I liken what we do in supporting new children into our programs; purposely and with intention building their trust, their respect, their comfort and sense of belonging and efficacy in managing their environment – to the skill and precision of a surgeon with a scalpel Supporting children through this tran-

sition and then onto building relationships with their peers, finding positive ways to work out their differences, to make their needs known, to share, to be angry, to be hurt and to make-up, to learn and experiment without judgement are specific skills I have deepened and honed over the years to the benefit of children.

Little Meg came to our daycare when she was not quite 2 upon referral of CAS with failure to thrive. She had medical issues, did not walk, sit or speak well and spent most of her time lying on the floor on her back. Most of her little life up to this point had been spent alone in her crib and she had a peculiar way of watching her world – as if through bars. With a lot of encouragement, purposeful activities and considerable amounts of time Meg became den mother in the toddler room. She ruled the roost; bossing the younger ones - taking them here and there as she saw fit, and intervening when there were disagreements.

There was lots of anxious concern when it was Meg's time to graduate to the pre-school room at 31/2 where she would have to manage steep stairs, older kids on the move and a more sophisticated social world. Yet, in time Meg again became the bossy den mother. When she went on into school she found her passion – reading and asking endless questions about complicated things. She became quite a little brainiac but was always quick to share what she knew with the other children – whether they wanted to know or NOT. Because of her medical condition and her family circumstance, Meg will no doubt face many challenges in her life – but I know that what was given to her at the day care will stay with her and serve well through-out her life.

We not only provide places for learning and care we become community, “a” home for many, many children and families. I've conducted my share of tours for 14 – 16 year olds showing their first serious girl/boy friend the day care they went to. I've changed the diapers of parents who return with their children to have them cared for at the centre they went to. I've shared worries and concerns with grandparents who in an earlier time were sharing their concerns with me as parents. I've shared the loss of children with parents who have come back to the day care to grieve and remember their child with those who were important in their lives.

Child care centres can be places where new Canadian families find a public community space where they can talk and share their worries about their children and adapting to a new country. Child care centres offer these families an opportunity to take part on board of directors, in lending their knowledge and talent to the work of various committees, to become active in advocating for their children – I've seen many proud parents that have taken part in their first ever Canadian political experience at a child care rally – they felt good about doing this for their child and those of others.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Child care workers provide an invaluable service to children, families and society. Yet our work is often undervalued, underpaid and unrecognized. While governments pay lip service to invest-



ing in our most precious resource our children – they often completely overlook those who work with them. This notion that we work in the field for our love of children makes it easy to deny us decent wages, benefits and good working conditions. This is pervasive even within the child care community. The predominately female workforce (98% are women) reinforces these notions and the expectations that come with them. If we agitate for improvements we are often charged with being selfish, greedy, or told we are in the wrong field if we want to get rich. The unspoken expectation is - if we are good and caring women we will accept our lot and make the best of what we are given - happily and without complaint.

Wages and benefits vary widely from centre to centre and region to region, ranging from a low of \$9 to a high of \$24 an hour. The higher wages exist in municipal child care centres where large municipal locals negotiate collective agreements that include child care staff or in college lab programs where again child care staff are part of a larger union, or in the school-based child care programs where there are more standardized salary grids. The vast majority of us however (about 80 - 85%) are employed in small stand alone community-based child care centres scattered in cities and towns across the province. Often unconnected and isolated from one another these centres can employ anywhere from between 5 – 20 staff (20 being high). It is in for-profit child care that the wages and benefits are lowest; and where there is a greater number of untrained staff – because for-profit employers pay →

workers that do not hold an ECE credential less - substantially less. Unionization rates in the sector are low at about 12%. This situation causes real downward pressures on wages and benefits at the higher end and threatens closure and privatization of directly operated child care centres and college lab schools.

Access to health benefits, retirement savings, workplace safety and WSIB coverage again vary widely depending on whether you work in a directly operated centre, a non-profit community based or private for-profit centre. The vast majority of child care workers have very basic health benefit coverage; they often do not have family illness leave, maternity top-up and often can not take full advantage of maternity/parental leave because they cannot exist on just over 50% of their income.

The complex funding arrangement between the municipal and provincial government and reliance on parent fees (parent fee make-up about 40% of funding) confound attempts to deal with low wages in the sector. When we negotiate wage increases parent fees often rise. In the late 1980's the province brought in a "Wage Enhancement Grant" (a direct 100% provincial grant to child care employers to cover a portion of staff salaries) to help off-set this effect. However in 1996 the Harris government capped the WEG and all new staff positions created since this time do not receive the WEG - this puts a downward pressure on wages in the sector. It also means that we can have two staff working side-by-side doing exactly the same work requiring exactly the same training and one is making from \$6,000 - \$9,000 dollars less a year than the other.

We are also covered under Proxy Pay Equity and had made incremental gains from 1993 until 1996 when the Harris government stopped funding employers to meet this obligation. In 2001 unions mounted a court challenge and won - funding was re-instituted until 2006. It was hoped by many at the time that the prov-

ince would continue beyond this point but it was not to be. Funding ended and again small voluntary parent boards were left with a huge unfunded liability and once again justice was denied for the 98% of women working in the field.

Fragmentation in community based child care makes it extremely difficult for either voluntary boards or frontline staff to come together to discuss and devise actions for improving our situation. Child care centres operating in isolation of one another are on their own in trying to find individual solutions to systemic problems

Low wages, lack of value and recognition creates real problems for recruiting and retaining a skilled and experienced workforce. It is not uncommon for child care staff to work 9-hour days with no coffee break and one-hour unpaid lunch, split-shifts over a 10 hour day, to juggle children between programs to cover shifts and maintain ratios. The difficulty in finding replacement staff can mean staff is often required to come into work sick or to work short-staffed. And to cheerily agree to forgo a scheduled vacation because a replacement could not be found.

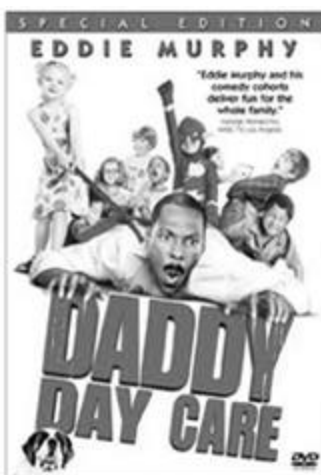
That fewer people are coming into the field or staying once they get here has an undermining affect on programs, relationships with the children and families and even with co-workers. A worker from a newly organized centre - a more senior staff (about 6 years) admitted that she had given up investing emotional energy in nurturing relationships with new co-workers because they came and went so quickly that it was just not worth it.

LOOKING FORWARD

Despite the federal/provincial child care agreements and despite the province of Ontario's *Best Start* plan with the goal of building 25,000 new child-care-spaces the conditions and quality in child care centres are deteriorating. *Best Start* has created additional strains in an already fragile system and compounds funding gaps related to unfunded pay equity, WEG and more than a decade of flat lined funding for child care centres. Child care centres have not seen annual inflationary increases in their budgets for over a decade - many centres are facing budget deficits in the coming years if these funding shortfalls are not soon addressed. Employers trying to do more with less, while trying to grapple with the growing needs in their communities, expect staff again - "to do their best" with what is given.

So what compels child care workers to stay and to fight for a national child care program - Well, because we know that what we do is important in the lives of young children and their families and yes - you got it - our love of children - And because we know we deserve recognition for the important work we do. **R**

Shellie Bird is Union Education Officer with CUPE 2204, Child Care Workers.



Private, segmented child care is unable to satisfy the demands of workers, parents, children or moviegoers.

What's Wrong with Kyoto?

Capital's Dangerous Gimmick

Patrick Bond, Rehana Dada and Graham Erion

With climate change posing one of the gravest threats to capital accumulation – not to mention humankind and our environment – it is little wonder that economists such as Sir Nicholas Stern, establishment politicians like Gordon Brown and Al Gore, and financiers at the World Bank and the City of London have begun warning the public. They are all pushing for more market solutions as the way to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

This was the key theory motivating capitalist states' support for the Kyoto Protocol. And since February 2005, when the protocol was ratified by Russia and formally came into effect, a great deal more money and propaganda has been invested in the carbon market, including at a major Nairobi climate conference last month.

Rather than forcing countries or firms to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions, Kyoto Protocol designers created a carbon market – from thin air – and gave countries a minimal reduction target (5 percent from 1990 emissions levels, to be achieved by 2012). They can either meet that target through their own reductions, or by purchasing emissions credits from countries or firms that reduce their own greenhouse gasses beyond their target level.

One of the key carbon trading mechanisms instituted by Kyoto is the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). This is an arrangement which enables countries to offset their carbon targets by investing in emissions reduction projects in other countries – such as tree planting or wind power projects in the Third World.

But as Larry Lohmann from the British NGO Cornerhouse and the Durban Group for Climate Justice remarks, “The distribution of carbon allowances [the prerequisite for trading] constitutes one of the largest, if not the largest, projects for creation and regressive distribution of property rights in human history.”

Big oil companies, in particular, can win property rights to pollute at the level they always have, instead of facing up to their historic debt to the Third World for using it as dumping ground.

South Africa is a good case study of the abuses of carbon trading. In mid-2005 Sasol, one of the country's largest companies, admitted that its gas pipeline project proposal to the CDM bureaucracy lacked the key requirement of “additionality” – the firm doing something that it would not have done anyway – thus unveiling the CDM as vulnerable to blatant scamming.

At Durban's vast Bisasar Road rubbish dump – Africa's largest landfill – community protests against ongoing carcinogenic emissions have derailed the World Bank and municipal state's plans to market a methane-capture project at the site as a CDM project. According to Sajida Khan, a cancer victim leading the fight, “The poor countries are so poor they will accept crumbs. The World Bank knows this and they are taking advantage of it.”

Similar protests across the Third World have targeted destructive CDM schemes such as tree planting at Brazil's Plantar industrial timber plantation and in indigenous communities mass demonstrations are raising the profile of the dangerous market.

Carbon trading may also suffer classic contradictions of capitalist markets, such as volatility, overproduction and manipulation. In April, Gordon Brown made a strong pitch at the United Nations “for a global carbon trading market as the best way to protect the endangered environment while spurring economic growth.”

But ten days later, the European Union's Emissions Trading market crashed thanks to the overallocation of pollution rights, and the carbon market price lost over half its value in a single day, destroying many CDM projects earlier considered viable investments.

Guardian columnist George Monbiot recently explained why CDM schemes like tree planting are so dubious: “While they have a pretty good idea of how much carbon our factories and planes and cars are releasing, scientists are much less certain about the amount of carbon tree planting will absorb. When you drain or clear the soil to plant trees, for example, you are likely to release some carbon, but it is hard to tell how much.

“Planting trees in one place might stunt trees elsewhere, as they could dry up a river which was feeding a forest downstream. Or by protecting your forest against loggers, you might be driving them into another forest. In other words, you cannot reasonably claim to have swapped the carbon stored in oil or coal for carbon absorbed by trees. Mineral carbon, while it remains in the ground, is stable and quantifiable. Biological carbon is labile and uncertain.”

The main force for a genuine alternative to capitalism's fake market mitigation strategy will be public pressure.

With Third World communities and progressive environmentalists – especially the Durban Group for Climate Justice – seeking and finding allies serious about the climate crisis, there will be fewer opportunities for Nicholas Stern and Gordon Brown to sell bogus market solutions to capital's pollution problems. **R**

Patrick Bond, Rehana Dada and Graham Erion are editors of the new book *Climate Change, Carbon Trading and Civil Society*. They have been supporters of the Durban Declaration on Carbon Trading available at www.sinkswatch.org.



A Really Inconvenient Truth: The Left Beyond Kyoto

Matt Fodor

Joel Kovel, former psychiatrist, long-time left activist and academic currently based at Bard College in Annandale, New York, [spoke at the University of Toronto on April 3rd](#). Kovel spoke about his book, *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?* As the book's provocative title suggests, Kovel argues that the capitalist system itself is responsible for the ecological crisis and that the solution requires transcending capitalism.

Kovel, one of the world's most prominent proponents of eco-socialism, believes that we have reached a critical juncture in civilization and the future depends on people being able to grasp this idea, intellectually and emotionally. The world is structured – in terms of its economy, state structures, etc – as a continually expanding system that converts everything in its path into commodities, subordinating everything on the planet to capitalism. While there are no blueprints for an eco-socialist society, we need an ecologically-oriented socialism that is part of an international project. Kovel argues that eco-socialism should be conceived as a form of “globalization from below.”

For Kovel, the development of eco-socialism is based on a conjuncture of two principles. First, is the realization of socialism: the free development of the world, where humans are free to develop their capacities without alienation and where there is freely associated labor. At its core, socialism does not mean public ownership or statism. Second is the realization of eco-centric values - which involves the healing of ecosystems and not viewing humans as dominating over nature but rather as being within nature.

Kovel's main critique of actually existing eco-politics, as represented by Al Gore and others, is that it ignores capitalism itself. Kovel opposes the Kyoto protocols on the grounds that it puts the solution to global warming in the hands of the capitalist class who created the problem in the first place. Contrary to many on the radical left, Kovel argues that the Kyoto protocols are not the first step but the wrong step.

Mainstream eco-politics views climate change as a technical problem that requires a technical solution. However, given that

capitalism is responsible for the crisis, its solution is in fact rooted in class struggle. In it, every aspect of the industrial system is at stake - no exploitation of labor would occur otherwise. When investigating Kyoto under the lens of class analysis, Kovel finds that the protocols strengthen the bourgeoisie and should be opposed. Kyoto gives control over climate change to the capitalist class and makes ‘globalization from below’ impossible. Essentially it is an attempt to bring big business on board.

George Bush opposes Kyoto from the right, but Kovel stresses that Kyoto is the brainchild of Third Way politicians like Bill Clinton and Al Gore. The call for pollution credits for greenhouse gas emissions, for example, not only fails in terms of regulating corporate behavior but also creates new value to be accumulated. In supporting Kyoto, the mainstream environmental movement has served to legitimate the capitalist system.

In terms of heading toward eco-socialism, Kovel outlined two goals. First, is a democratization of the state, which would reduce the power of the bourgeoisie. Second, requires a change in lifestyle because it is impossible for the planet to survive with the current level of consumption and within the existing productive apparatus. Thus the issue of climate change can only be overcome when social and economic justice is achieved and production pursued under a different approach.

Pointing to some hopeful developments, Kovel noted that we are seeing assaults on the petroleum system that fuels (excuse the pun) the capitalist system as a whole. In the Niger Delta, guerilla warfare is being committed against the oil industry. In Costa Rica, there is now a prohibition on oil extraction. In Bolivia, the Morales government is blocking privatization of oil and interrupting the activities of the multinational oil giants. The ‘Cuba-Venezuela axis’ may lead to some hopeful developments as well. **R**

Matt Fodor graduated from Bard College and is currently a Ph.D. student in political science at York University.

Carbon Offsets Not Welcome Here

Larry Lohmann

Night falls early in the flat landscape outside Raipur, the capital of India's Chhatisgarh state. Towering above the dry rice fields are endless factories, producing sponge iron for export to China. They pump out smoke that dims the setting sun and blackens trees, soil and workers' faces alike.

Welcome to the frontier of the global carbon offset market. Here, as in hundreds of other locations around the world, polluting private companies are setting up new profit centres to capture green finance.

POLLUTERS CASHING IN

In return for documents claiming that they are cleaning up part of their operations, industries such as Chhatisgarh's crude iron works hope to sell carbon credits to Europeans, Japanese or North Americans bent on compensating for some of the carbon dioxide emissions of their factories and cars.

But to many Indian activists, the Chhatisgarh iron magnates' plans look like little more than opportunism on the part of a dirty and exploitative industry. With or without efficiency improvements, Chhatisgarh's largely coal-fired sponge iron works will continue to spoil farmland and crops, displace villagers, deplete and contaminate water reserves and damage the health of local residents.

In December, closure orders were slapped on several of the plants for pollution violations. Out of fear for their livelihoods, one affected local village, Charenga, has even resorted to vigilante action to block company access to a recently-built factory nearby. Today the plant lies idle.

Such conflicts often come as a surprise to idealists convinced that carbon offset projects – whether set up under the auspices of the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) or under voluntary private schemes – will bankroll community-friendly renewable energy and set the south on a low-carbon path to industrialisation.

But the Chhatisgarh case is hardly exceptional. There are a number of similar examples:

- In Minas Gerais, Brazil, farmers, trade unions, churches and rights organisations are incensed about a land-grabbing plantation and pig iron firm that has tried to peddle credits on the grounds that without carbon offset finance it would have to replace its charcoal fuel with mineral coal.
- On Ecuador's high plains, peasants have complained bitterly about the financial losses they suffered after signing a contract to maintain tree plantations designed to offset carbon dioxide emissions from a coal-fired power station in the Netherlands.



- In South Africa, the giant chemicals, mining and fuels corporation Sasol has stirred controversy by arguing that it should be able to sell carbon credits for a natural gas pipeline. Its own executives admit the pipeline has already been paid for as part of the company's normal expansion.
- In Maharashtra, India, wind farms are stirring controversy by taking over land needed by local people.
- Around Mount Elgon in Uganda, villagers are being beaten and shot at by authorities attempting to keep them out of a national park. The Dutch organisation FACE Foundation has been working with the Uganda Wildlife Authority to plant and maintain "offset" trees in the park, aiming to export carbon credits to Europe.

A CHEAP FIX

A quick look at market fundamentals suggests why such conflicts are almost inevitable. The biggest offset buyers want cheap carbon credits, and lots of them. The most reliable providers will be big, highly-capitalised firms or agencies in a position to hire carbon consultants and accountants, liaise with officials or pay the fees needed for UN registration.

Carbon-saving schemes that take the trouble to respect community rights, on the other hand, tend to be fiddly, expensive, low-yield, or difficult to implement politically. Revealingly, only 2% of carbon credits from registered CDM projects are generated by renewable energy projects, while over two-thirds come from big installations that destroy industrial gases or burn methane from waste dumps or coal mines.

Against this market logic, well-meaning schemes like the CDM Gold Standard – developed by WWF and various businesses to showcase carbon offset projects that foster sustainable development – have little chance. As a RaboBank executive recently observed: "Few in this market can deal with communities."

Where does that leave corporations who want to be seen taking a responsible approach to global warming?

One answer is obvious: abandon carbon offsets and help push for structural, long-term changes that can actually be effective in keeping coal, oil and gas in the ground. Shifting subsidies away from fossil fuels, supporting communities defending their lands against carbon extraction, investing in low carbon energy and transport systems, and instituting tougher regulation on pollution are all necessary steps to a carbon-free future. **R**

Larry Lohmann works with the Corner House, a human rights and environmental organisation based in the UK.

Fightbacks:

Struggling Against Poverty in Ontario

Steve Watson

Unions talk about reaching out beyond their own ranks to larger communities and making alliances where there are common interests. Trade unionists recognize that doing this is critical to the labour movement if it is to go forward.

One case where the talk turned into action was the launching of a focused campaign by the Labour Council of Toronto and York Region to raise the minimum wage in Ontario from \$8 to \$10 - the exact hourly wage a worker employed 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, in a large city would need to reach the 2005 poverty line. The most commonly used poverty line is Statistics Canada's 2005 Before Tax Low Income Cut-off for an individual - no dependents - in a community of a half a million or more.

Recognizing a rare opening - an opening created first by the unpopularity of Ontario MPPs voting themselves a salary increase in December 2006 equal to the entire earnings of a minimum wage worker in one year and second by the tabling of a \$10 minimum wage bill by newly elected NDP MPP from Parkdale Cheri DiNovo - Toronto Labour Council President John Cartwright immediately set to designing a campaign to push passage of Bill 150. The door was opened even further by a relentless series of stories and editorials on poverty running in the Toronto Star. The Star editorial board decided it was time to turn the paper back into the social justice campaigner its founder had envisaged the paper to be. Almost every day for weeks on end, the Star pounded the drum of a \$10 minimum wage.

What made the Labour Council's campaign so energized and refreshing was that it was built by a series of well-organized community forums held strategically across Toronto's diverse, immigrant neighbourhoods with the support of local community organizations. Meetings were held in Parkdale, North Etobicoke, Thorncliffe, Weston-Mt. Denis, Malvern and Davenport. Low waged workers came out to the community forums and told their stories. John Cartwright confided that until these meetings he had seen himself as anti-poverty activist. He comes from a different culture of relatively high paid construction labour, but hearing minimum waged workers talk about their lives made a lasting impression on him and everyone who took part.

A married couple from Guatemala with children described how they work all week, including jobs on the weekend, to pay the rent and feed the kids. They seldom see their kids because it takes all the hours of work they can find at low pay to make ends meet.

The Labour Council partnered with the Workers Action Centre, Campaign 2000 on Child and Family Poverty, Citizens for Public Justice, the Canadian Federation of Students, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and others. The Workers Action Centre organizes among low waged workers in precarious and non-traditional work not usually represented by unions.

Petitions and cards began to flow in by the tens of thousands. MP Peggy Nash added momentum by putting in a bill to set a federal minimum wage at \$10. And the NDP's Paul Ferreira took a by-election from the Liberals in York South Weston - largely by capturing the momentum of the \$10 minimum wage campaign.

The demand for a national childcare program and the \$10 minimum wage became the themes of Toronto's International Women's Day march. The turn out was larger than ever. Organizers turned the pre-march forum over to women in low paid jobs. The politicians had to sit and listen. The CLC Ontario Region created materials that could be used province wide to push the \$10 movement beyond the boundaries of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council.

Some economists write that minimum wage increases mainly help university and college students who are in multi-income, middle class households. Some studies like *When Working is not enough to escape Poverty* done in August 2006 for the federal government caution that not all minimum wage earners are "poor" and that many workers making more than \$10 an hour are still part of poor families. Family circumstances play a huge role in determining poverty. Only 4 to 5% of all workers in Canada are employed at the minimum wage set by law in their provinces or territories, but all those facts don't refute the reality that at least one in six workers in Canada makes less than \$10 an hour, that less than \$10 an hour is a sub-poverty-line wage, and that while a minimum wage hike in itself is not the one-measure-fixes-all solution to poverty, a substantial minimum wage increase would be part of any program to end poverty.

A substantial increase to the Canada Child Tax Benefit, to about \$5,000, plus a minimum wage hike to \$10 across Canada with inflation indexation for both would virtually wipe out poverty for any full-time working single parent with a dependent child.

The Labour Council, the Workers Action Centre, Campaign 2000 and Citizens for Public Justice coupled the \$10 minimum wage with a broader program of demands around the need for effective enforcement of the Employment Standards Act (ESA), card-based certification of unions to allow more workers to organize and bargain collectively, and coverage for contract, agency, temporary and self-employed workers under the ESA. The fastest growing part of the labour force is workers in precarious, insecure employment.

The Ontario Liberals were looking at heading off more losses to the NDP when the Premier got the message and made a pre-budget announcement that he would raise the minimum wage to \$10.25 by 2010. The March 22 budget committed to increases of 75 cents a year to \$8.75 in 2008; to \$9.50 in 2009; and to \$10.25 in 2010.

Even though low waged workers will be waiting until 2010 to

make a 2005 poverty line wage in Ontario, the Premier's commitment to increase the minimum wage by 28% over three years is a victory – by any measure. It simply would never have happened without an energetic and inspired mobilization of labour and community activists, and the willingness of ordinary people to use their voice – and their votes – to send a message to the McGuinty government.

There's no guarantee that the McGuinty Liberals will win re-election on October 10. Some say McGuinty could renounce this commitment just as easily as he renounced others. There's no reason to believe a John Tory Conservative government will honour his opponent's commitments to raise the minimum wage to \$10.25 by 2010. However, either McGuinty or Tory would only be inviting a million workers to come knocking if they decide to play games with that commitment.

All these things being said, there is a troubling issue that still needs attention. Anti-poverty activists have been slugging away for years with small resources to build a movement that addresses not only the poverty of the low waged, but also the poverty of those unable to work because of disability, because of injury on the job, because of the lack of child-care, because of the lack of prescription drug coverage that some people can't forgo and which is seldom provided in low wage jobs, or simply because of the lack of jobs. Anti-poverty activists in the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice and the Ontario Needs a Raise Network have been for years circulating petitions, holding rallies and marches, including several long ones like the Walk, Wheel and Ride for Dignity from Peterborough to Toronto in 2005, calling for a \$10 minimum wage and increases to Ontario Works (OW - welfare) and the Ontario Disability Support Plan (ODSP) with an end to the claw-back of the National Child Benefit Supplement or baby bonus from ODSP and OW recipients with children.

Health Care Providers against Poverty, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and others have organized strong actions like the Hunger March before last year's provincial budget. These anti-poverty campaigns' demands for increases to OW and ODSP were largely conspicuous by their absence from the labour council's campaign. The conventional wisdom is that "single issue" campaigns work best because they are simple. It is also difficult to mix the issues of wages and welfare, or so we believe.

Conventional wisdom aside, the reality expressed by many of the people in poverty who came out to speak in the community



forums was a reality of low waged work combined with welfare. Welfare is the severance pay for low waged and precariously employed workers who never qualify for Employment

Insurance (EI) payouts and who almost never get any severance from their employers. Ironically I just spent a weekend in a worker occupied factory where the CAW members were demanding the severance they are owed by law! The lack of any real income security programs for workers who are poor – the shitty welfare rates and the impossible to collect EI – is a large part of the reason why low waged workers put up with bad treatment, don't make complaints to Employment Standards, and don't organize into unions. They'll have no money if they get the boot for trying to make things better for themselves and their co-workers. It was to attack worker confidence that welfare was cut by 22% in 1995 and EI qualifying rules were cut in 1996.

Can the issues of people on welfare reach the general public? The Income Security Advocacy's Centre's Hands Off the Baby Bonus campaign is a good example of a campaign on ODSP and OW issues that did reach a broader public. The Premier felt constrained to address the issue even if he didn't do it justice. When you explain to someone that there's a federal child benefit that all poor children are supposed to receive except that the poorest children of the poor don't receive it – because 75% of it is clawed back by the province - people are alarmed.

The Hands Off campaign was also gathering momentum in the build up to the March 22 budget.

A union or a central labour organization has the absolute right to set its own demands according to what it believes its members will support and on the basis of what is achievable, but anti-poverty movements have the absolute right to press unions to support their demands also.

Unions and poor people need to be both linked and autonomous at the same time. That's a difficult thing to do. It's especially difficult for poor people to sustain their movements without union help. The skills trade unionists need in anti-poverty struggles are the skills of good bargainers who learn how to articulate demands of sections of the membership whose issues they never experienced directly.

The minimum wage campaign is not done yet. Nor are we done learning the lessons of this remarkably positive experience. **R**

Steve Watson works at the CAW National Office.

What's next for the Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign?

Sheila Wilmot

When I saw the Toronto Star headline on March 21 that said that the Ontario Liberal government was “fighting child poverty” by raising the minimum wage to 10.25 an hour in 2010 I thought both “gimme a break” and “there goes the minimum wage campaign.” And reading a Toronto & York Region Labour Council communique that was passed to me few days ago only confirms that the demobilization has begun before the mobilizing even had a chance to really take off. The vagueness of the “what’s next” says it all.

The Toronto & York Region Labour Council, representing 195,000 unionized workers in the Greater Toronto Area, threw its weight behind the campaign to raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour shortly after Ontario NDP MPP Cheri DiNovo had her \$10 minimum-wage Bill 150 pass second reading. Third reading is still to come, notwithstanding the grand McGuinty government announcement to move to \$8.75 in 2008, \$9.50 in 2009 followed by \$10.25 in 2010. Interestingly, when I emailed her office recently to find out what was up with third reading, the response I got was to stay tuned through the Labour Council campaign network. I thought she was in the opposition and they were participating an election on Oct 10? It’s Sorbara and company who made this increased minimum wage promise, not the NDP. Who does she think will benefit from that?

This isn’t the first time the Ontario Liberals have structured a phased-in minimum wage increase this decade. The first – which had no NDP bill or Labour Council-backed campaign behind it – was a 17% increase that saw the \$6.85 per hour amount go up to \$7.15 Feb 1, 2004 and reach \$8.00 by this past Feb 1. So, as the Labour Council press release points out, a 28% increase over three years is something to be pleased about, but we can’t really call it a “victory” – and we certainly shouldn’t stop the organizing just as it’s getting going.

There was a flurry of town hall activity this winter, with the Council taking the minimum wage campaign to communities all across the GTA and beyond. Many people attended and thoughtfully participated in those meetings, both listening to panelists and working in small groups. A good number of these people were low-waged workers themselves, people who probably aren’t quite as excited as the press release is to wait ‘til 2010 for their \$10. And, where do their ideas, concerns and energy go now that we’re just focusing on building the petition through the web site and some nebulous “next phase” on employment standards?

I think a number of us are asking ourselves just what this is

all about for the Council. True, Labour Council has been undergoing a reformation over the last few years, responding to calls from communities of colour for a more multiracial representation in the leadership. As the council got on board this minimum wage campaign, they were also saying their goal was to ‘organize the organized,’ to reach out to the 195,000 workers who are indirectly represented by Labour Council via their unions’ membership, and



well, to do just that, to ‘reach down to the roots.’ What remains unclear is just what the leadership wanted to do with these workers they’re reaching down to, let alone how they’re going to do it.

I fear the perspectives and concerns of those folks have become symbolic with the demobilization of this campaign; without an true ongoing, grassroots campaign that is given financial, political and admin support for the grassroots to really direct and become the a key part of the working-class leadership, how is organizing the organized being materially connected to these community meetings?

Another example of how the campaign barely got out of the blocks was the important links that were made between striking

CUPE 3261 workers - part-timers at the University of Toronto Press warehouse making \$9.36 an hour – and the \$10 an hour minimum target. These folks were asking for a 2% increase (!) but were put on the picket line by typical corporate greed. They work alongside full-timers making \$13 to \$14 an hour, with benefits. Some of these full-timers, also in a CUPE local, were scabbing on their brothers & sisters jobs by working voluntary overtime. Nice.

CUPE and Labour Council organized a well-attended downtown demo that made the links between the paltry wages of these workers and the campaign fight across Ontario. One of the CUPE 3261 negotiators was invited to speak on one of the town hall panels during the strike. These were uplifting and effective initiatives for both the workers and members of the broader community. Yet, it was only the beginning, the very tip of the iceberg. The workers – who had high spirits and determination on their picket line the few times I was there – have since settled for a contract that will get them to \$10 “sooner” than minimum wage workers in Ontario. But they don’t have it now, they don’t have benefits and they’re still treated as second class in relation to the full-timers in the warehouse.

These kinds of difficult conditions require a long-term, on-the-ground mobilization strategy that will bring low-waged workers together, within unions, amongst unions and within communities. Imagine stepping up the campaign now, rather than winding it down. Imagine expanding the focus to more folks who are in bargaining right now or about to go into bargaining. The minimum wage campaign could be a powerful catalyst to those workers to actually go on strike, which could in turn make this into a street-level movement by bringing out community people to the picket lines to really threaten the employers in hotels, factories, grocery stores and other low-waged service-work. Then community-based meetings could have a tangible, material link between the low-waged unionized workplace and where people, unionized or not, live and/or work. Then those ‘town halls’ could be truly organizing meetings that Labour Council puts its resources at the service of.

There’s a fundamental challenge here for official labour with this kind of thing and I’m quite sure official labour is well aware of it: the union officials and staff who control bargaining, service provision and the whole union environment for most workers would not exactly be ecstatic about their memberships being so politically organized, about them taking control of negotiations, directing bargaining and actually going on strike. That is not generally the way the business of unionism is done these days, and it hasn’t been for a long time. This is the kind of stuff that threatens bureaucrats’ power, control and, ultimately, salaries.

But you can’t seriously change top-down functioning to bottom-up without taking such risks. And, while it is important that all our organizations have leaderships representative of our populations, if a few workers of colour are just being elected to higher-up union positions here and there –

albeit often doing very hard and important work – without the majority having real decision-making power in their work or community lives, then anti-racist organizing is stopping at much-needed yet quite limited anti-racist reforms.

So, let’s be glad that folks will get \$0.75 more an hour in March 2008. More is definitely better. But let’s not thump ourselves on the back too hard. Let’s not pretend this isn’t all part of some kind of election jockeying for position that has little to do with concern for low-waged workers. And for solidarity’s sake let’s please stop calling them “living” or even “liveable” wages. You do the math; it’s quite simply offensive. **R**

Sheila Wilmot is an organizer and writer in Toronto. More of her work can be found at leftqueries.blogspot.com.



AIR CANADA WORKERS PROTEST 700 JOB CUTS

Roger Annis

Five hundred angry Air Canada workers held a march and rally on March 24th at the perimeter of the Vancouver airport to condemn the company's announcement earlier in the week that it would cut 700 jobs from its maintenance facility here. The job cuts are a result of the decision by Delta Air Lines to end its maintenance contract with Air Canada. The U.S. carrier is reportedly shifting its repair and overhaul work to one company in the U.S. and another in Hong Kong.

The rally was organized by Lodge 764 of the International Association of Machinists (IAM), the union representing affected workers. Speakers included leaders of the British Columbia Federation of Labour and representatives of other Air Canada unions, including the Canadian Autoworkers Union and the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

YEARS OF CONCESSIONS

The 700 layoffs in Vancouver will spill over to Winnipeg and Montreal because many workers in Vancouver will exercise seniority rights and "bump" fellow union members in the other cities. The Air Canada facility in Vancouver employs 1,000 workers; Winnipeg's has fewer workers, while Montreal's has several times more than Vancouver.

Air Canada, once teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, has become a very profitable airline over the past few years. The directors of the company, including its reviled CEO Robert Milton, have received millions of dollars of bonuses, and shareholders have done very well of late.

In contrast, Air Canada employees have seen little of the money they were pressured to give up during the hard times. A recent profit-sharing payment averaging several thousand dollars was made to unionized employees. But these same workers have given up reductions in salaries, vacations, and pension benefits worth several hundred million dollars over the past ten years. Meanwhile, hours of work and shifts have become longer and more difficult.

The Vancouver maintenance facility previously belonged to Canadian Airlines. That airline was facing bankruptcy in 1999 when it merged with Air Canada. Salary and work rule concessions accelerated in the merged company.

Air Canada is awash in cash, yet workers are working longer shifts and many overtime hours. Conditions would seem ripe for

the unions to campaign for a reduction of the work hours of each employee with suitable financial compensation. Such a campaign could unite workers across the company and inspire support from other unions.

Unions in France waged such a fight when unemployment there soared during the 1990's. A 35-hour work week was enshrined in law in the year 2000; two out of three workers in France benefit from it. Workers in Germany have won similar gains.

BLAME LAID ON FOREIGN WORKERS

But speeches by union leaders to the rally in Vancouver charted a different course. Blame for the layoffs at Air Canada was laid on workers in other countries. That message is fueled by the recent purchase by Air Canada of an aircraft maintenance facility in El Salvador.

One IAM leader asked the crowd at the rally, "Are the workers in El Salvador capable of overhauling an airplane and getting it safely back into the skies?" He drew a loud, "No" from the rally.

A leaflet produced by the IAM and now being distributed to airline passengers reads, "Instead of protecting aircraft maintenance jobs here in Canada, (Air Canada) has purchased a maintenance operation in El Salvador and laid off 700 BC workers!"

"Air Canada has already shipped other jobs overseas to countries like India, including sending aircraft maintenance jobs to China."

BC Federation of Labour Secretary-Treasurer Angela Shirer, a former Canadian Airlines worker in Vancouver, condemned Air Canada's purchase of the facility in El Salvador when she addressed the rally. "This is a country of low wages, where there are no safety regulations and no human rights," she said.

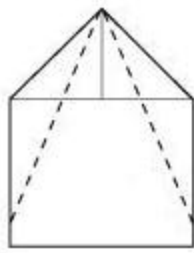
The 700 jobs cut in Vancouver result from Delta redirecting its work to the U.S. and Hong Kong. But there is a great concern among Air Canada workers that more jobs will be lost to El Salvador.

ELECTIONEERING THE ANSWER?

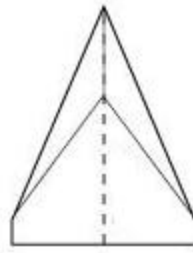
The other major theme of the rally was to pressure the Canadian government to restrict the movement of investment capital from Canada to other countries. A leader of Canadian Autoworkers Union (CAW) Local 2002 spoke to the rally and explained that



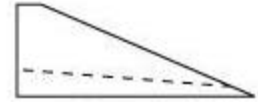
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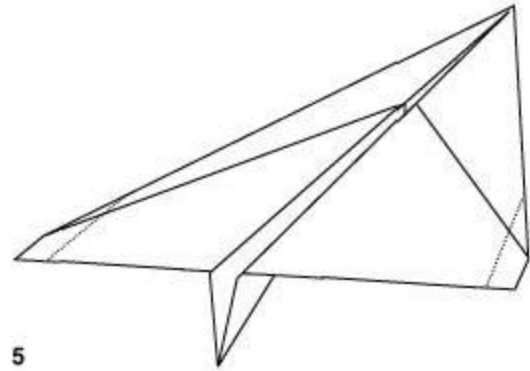
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many manufacturing workers in Canada are losing their jobs today because companies are relocating their work to other countries. Her local represents passenger service agents at Air Canada.

Reading from a prepared text, she said that “middle class” people must come together through the electoral process to stop the “off-shoring” of jobs. The free trade agreements of the past twenty years have allowed companies to freely move their capital across borders, and this must end. She said that middle class people needed to elect “progressive parties” that would prevent this.

In the last federal election, CAW leaders advocated support for the Liberal Party, a party that wholeheartedly supports free trade agreements. Presently, the union is campaigning against a proposed trade agreement with South Korea that was initiated by the previous Liberal government in Ottawa.

Two members of the Canadian Parliament and one member of the BC legislature from the New Democratic Party were introduced to the rally. Member of Parliament Peter Julian pledged that NDP members of Parliament would fight in Ottawa to keep Air Canada’s maintenance jobs in Vancouver.

HOW CAN WE PROTECT JOBS?

With an anticipated downturn of the U.S. economy, and continued instability in world financial markets, workers in the U.S. and Canada are likely to see sharp increases in layoffs and unemployment. Unions face the challenge of developing a program and active campaigns to defend jobs.

Campaigns that aim to restrict the movement of capital and jobs across national borders are very problematic. For one, capitalists will fiercely resist any limits on their powers. Why not simply nationalize enterprises that show no concern for the public good? The airline industry is a prime candidate for nationalization because it delivers a vital public service.

Another problem is that campaigns against so-called free trade agreements can be divisive to the working class. If not carefully presented and led, they can pit the workers of one country against the workers of another in the competition for jobs. Yes, we should oppose reckless and destructive trade agreements between the capitalists of different countries. But we should do so by building alliances with workers in underdeveloped countries such as

El Salvador and Mexico, including helping them to improve their salaries and conditions of work.

It is the corporations and their governing political parties that are responsible for the economic uncertainties that workers face in the capitalist world. Demands such as the following would highlight the source of that uncertainty and help unite the working class, including across international borders:

- * Reduce the workweek with no loss in pay.
- * Increase vacation entitlements.
- * Make unemployment insurance accessible to all, and extend the benefit period as needed. Currently, the unemployment insurance fund in Canada has a scandalous surplus of \$51 billion, yet access is harder than ever.
- * Retraining with full salary for workers who are laid off and wish to learn new skills.
- * Nationalize enterprises such as Air Canada that threaten jobs and provide important public services.

Ultimately, only a planned, socialist economy can eliminate the economic uncertainties that loom over the working classes of all countries. We can learn a lot from the new government of Venezuela under its president, Hugo Chavez. That country’s vast oil wealth is being put to the public good, both at home and in aid to poor people abroad. The people of Venezuela are moving forward in building a society of social justice, whereas we in Canada are going backwards. **R**

Roger Annis is an aircraft assembler and member of the International Association of Machinists in Vancouver.

Unions Learn from Defeat of Anti-Scab Bill

Joel Davison Harden

As many know, in the hothouse of federal politics, good ideas often get lost in the spin. On March 21, 2007, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) was the latest casualty in this tradition. MPs rejected a CLC-sponsored Bill (Bill C-257) that proposed a ban on 'replacement workers' (or 'scabs', in union speak) during labour strikes or management lock-outs. Trade unionists who fought hard for Bill C-257 are infuriated, and understandably so. Reform in this area is long overdue. And yet, as the tea leaves are read from this experience, there is potential bright side worth noting. Two important lessons were widely learned during the CLC's campaign for Bill C-257, both of which require further action from workers and their unions.

First, trade unionists discovered a corporate veto exists on Parliament Hill, and that workers need to do something about it. Secondly, trade unionists experienced the potential of large-scale, 'bottom-up' activism, which got labour further in its quest for federal anti-scab legislation than ever before. If interpreted correctly, these lessons offer important cues for rebuilding the labour movement, and the capacity for union activism. I'll return to this conclusion later. Before that, it's important to give readers a sense of the issues in Bill C-257.

THE ISSUES: ROGUE EMPLOYERS AND POLITICAL INDIFFERENCE

In many respects, the CLC and its member unions had a tough assignment in campaigning for Bill C-257. Given the low number of labour disputes each year, most workers don't wonder if anti-scab legislation exists to protect them and their family. In 2006, 97% of all collective bargaining in Canada didn't experience a labour strike or employer lockout. But anyone who has been on strike (or locked out) knows what scab labour means for their loved ones, their community, their union, and the country as a whole. The research is clear: when scabs are used, disputes last longer and frequently get nastier.

Bargaining is stalled, communities are divided, and tempers flare. Hundreds (often thousands) of work days are lost, and everyone suffers. In the worst cases, conflict results in serious injuries, or even workplace deaths. Consistently, however, a minority of rogue employers have chosen this destructive path. Inspired by hardline management consultants, they see workers as roadkill on the highway to corporate success. Typically, rogue employers refuse to bargain in good faith, and use scabs as a stick to beat unions. 'Do what we say', they thunder, 'or we'll throw you out on the street, and replace you with someone else.'

This was the story last Summer at Ekati Mine near Yellowknife, a town that saw neighbours torn apart by a ruthless multinational corporation (BHP Billington). This also happened in 2005 during the Telus lockout (in BC and Alberta), when thousands suffered at the hands of a profitable and vicious employer. This scenario repeated itself in Quebec between 2002-3, when workers at Vidéotron, Radio Nord, and Sécuro faced employers more interested in hiring scabs than bargaining in good faith. Unfortunately, despite repeated incidents like these, many federal politicians don't think rogue employers are a problem. Few of them have lived in a community torn apart by self-interested management consultants. Few of them have survived on strike pay, watched someone else take their job, or feel the pain when rogue employers exploit lax labour rules. To date, in the name of promoting 'workplace balance', federal MPs have preferred loose standards over policy that ensures fairness and respect.

This was the unfortunate conclusion of last review of the Canada Labour Code in 1999. Under current federal law, employers are only legally required to recognize a union exists in their workplace during a strike or lockout. After doing that, they're free to hire scabs by the busload, and pit working people against each other. An army of management-side lawyers offer hollow claims to justify this unbalanced and unfair situation. Typically, they paint

a doomsday scenario where Canada would be devastated by a ban on scab labour. If parliamentarians ban scabs, they say, unions will ratchet up labour costs, and business will flee to less regulated environments. But forty-five years of experience in Quebec and British Columbia (where scabs are banned) hasn't seen economic collapse, escalating wage demands, or any other alarmist vision advanced by opponents of anti-scab legislation. This is also true in any other countries that ban scab labour.

Quite clearly, on this issue and others, the view from the boardroom is different from the lunchroom. In the lived experience of working people, Canada suffers from lax federal rules that encourage rogue employers, while political indifference reigns in Ottawa. To reverse this tide, the labour movement starts from a different premise: that an injury to one is an injury to all. We defend any worker who suffers at the hands of rogue employers, and encourage laws to defend their interests. Recently, an opportunity to do so arrived with Bill C-257, a private member's Bill proposed by Richard Nadeau (MP-Gatineau) of the Bloc Québécois.

BILL C-257: 'BOTTOM-UP' ACTIVISM VS. CORPORATE FEAR MONGERING

At the outset, Bill C-257 enjoyed the full support of the Bloc and NDP, a strong majority of Liberals, and a sizeable chunk of the Tory caucus (about 16%). This fact was confirmed when the Bill sailed through Second Reading by a margin of 167 to 101. This happened despite an eleventh hour, eight-page, back-of-the-envelope study by federal officials that implied MPs should torpedo Bill C-257. The study was sent around the MP blackberry network on the day of Second Reading.

Martinis were promptly spilled in laps across Ottawa's poshest salons. How, corporate Canada asked, did this happen? Didn't Harper and Dion get the memo?

Why wasn't Bill C-257 killed in the name of 'workplace balance' and 'fairness', like all the other attempts? The difference-maker this time was a 'bottom-up' campaign organized by the CLC. In communities across the country, rank and file trade unionists visited their MPs, and reminded them of the havoc caused by rogue employers.

Given that MPs faced constituents, political indifference was harder to maintain. When MPs wouldn't meet with steelworkers, they got deluged with calls from autoworkers. When MPs wouldn't meet with autoworkers, they got harangued by telecommunications workers, miners, and public sector workers. When phone calls, emails or faxes went unreturned, union members (sometimes in large numbers) simply walked into constituency offices, and demanded a meeting. This time, MPs had to explain themselves to working people who represent huge blocks of votes. This time, MPs faced workers who lost their homes while rogue employers used scabs, or faced violence at the hands of management goons. This time, the labour movement didn't rely on its Ottawa staff.

Instead, the campaign was coordinated by the CLC's Political Action Department, but relied on the work of local activists. CLC staff kept close watch on the declared voting intentions of Liberal and Tory MPs (given local reports), and convened regular conference calls with organizers in the field. When Bill C-257 reached Second Reading, 150 trade unionists came to Ottawa to visit their MPs. At first, given they rarely stray from Parliament's back-rooms, this work flew under the radar for Ottawa's corporate lobbyists. That changed when Bill C-257 cleared Second Reading. Almost immediately, corporate Canada freaked out.

Newspaper editorials cried foul, as employers accused labour of strong-arming politicians. Bill C-257 faced delay tactics at the committee stage after Second Reading. Supporters pointed out the thick files on research on anti-scab legislation gathering dust on Parliament's shelves, and studies conducted at the provincial level. They urged MPs to move quickly on an issue left unresolved for decades. The advice was roundly ignored: the committee called over 50 witnesses, two-thirds of whom came from employer groups.

Business then set to work on the Liberals, who were identified as the key group

needing attention. Call centres were rented to bombard constituency offices with employer messages against Bill C-257. Don Boudria, former Liberal House Leader under Jean Chrétien, was hired by CN (among the angriest federal employers) to lobby any Liberal who appeared supportive of Bill C-257. He was joined by Gerrard Kennedy, a Liberal MP who often gets described as a 'left-leaning'. A wave of pinstriped lob-



byists then descended on Parliament Hill, issuing the same tired, self-serving arguments against anti-scab legislation.

Interestingly timed with this effort, CN provoked a strike with its train drivers. CN (who paid CEO Hunter Harrison \$53 million in 2006) demanded steep concessions, and ignored the union's appeal for an essential services agreement for commuter trains. When the freight trains slowed (commuter trains kept running given union pressure), CN's allies in parliament wailed, and demanded MPs rescind support for Bill C-257. Under this intense pressure, Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion withdrew support for Bill C-257. Mario Silva, the Liberal labour critic, promptly repeated the same message. Both promised to introduce anti-scab legislation later, citing irreconcilable problems with the 'Bloc's Bill'. Eventually, an unprecedented campaign of corporate fear mongering won out. Bill C-257 was defeated at Third Reading.

LOOKING FORWARD

The conclusion the labour movement draws from this experience is crucially important. Some might think a 'bottom-up' campaign for Bill C-257 was unnecessary, inef-

fective, or unduly expensive. Big business, some might suggest, showed its firm grip on the levers of Parliament. To get the best results, unions are best served avoiding politics, and sticking to their expertise at the bargaining table. Against this wayward interpretation, trade unionists should see the bright side of the Bill C-257 saga. Big business was forced to play its strongest cards. In doing so, their well-concealed clout in Canadian politics was exposed.

Don Boudria was awarded a senior position at Hill-Knowlton (one of Ottawa's most prestigious lobby firms) the day after Bill C-257 was defeated. The firm had the gall to announce this in the business pages of the Globe and Mail. In its arrogant tactics, CN actually demonstrated the need for better federal labour standards. Knowing full well it could expect back-to-work legislation, CN refused to bargain seriously, and demanded major concessions in key areas. This is hardly a framework for balance and fairness, and more Canadians know it. At the end of the day, Bill C-257 penetrated the milk toast mediocrity of Canadian politics, and forced big business to issue its veto on Parliament Hill. After witnessing this debacle, legions of trade unionists are now mad as hell.

This anger is understandable, even warranted. But as the labour movement struggles for relevance in the twenty-first century, it should tap this sentiment through more 'bottom-up' campaigns that challenge corporate rule in Ottawa. As we saw with Bill C-257, education and action at the local level can deliver impressive results. Today's near misses can be tomorrow's major victories. Earlier generations of trade unionists didn't pack up in the face of bitter defeats, and neither should we. Bob White, a former President of the CLC, was fond of talking about two dimensions in political activism: the force of one's argument, and, perhaps more importantly, the force behind it.

In its campaign for Bill C-257, Canada's labour movement rediscovered both, and marched forward fighting for a common goal. On its own, this was a huge success, and a far cry from the frustrating returns of modern industrial relations. We need more of the same in years to come. It's time for working people to take politics back through 'bottom up' activism. As some are already saying, bring on the 'small person' revolution. **R**

Joel Davison Harden works for the CLC.



Total Capitalism

Colin Leys

I recently received a circular from the Local Authority of the district in London where I live, which addressed me as a ‘customer.’ I should really be inured by now to neoliberalism’s relentless penetration of the ‘life world,’ but it took me aback all the same. I don’t buy anything from my local council; on the contrary, it is supposed to represent me. I elect it, and it spends my taxes. But in the mind of the official who wrote the circular it is evidently more like a corporation with something to sell: satisfaction, perhaps.

The example is trivial, but sobering all the same. The dream of contemporary capitalism is that everything should become a terrain of profitable enterprise, including most of what has hitherto been seen as the business of government. The political rationale offered for this is that in a globalized world national competitiveness depends on maximising efficiency, including the efficiency of public services, and that competition between market actors makes for efficiency. The local government official who had learned to think of electors not as sovereign citizens but as customers was merely reflecting this doctrine. But I was struck by an analogy: the vision of society implied by seeing citizens as customers – a society totally dedicated to capitalism – is not unlike the concept of ‘total war’ developed in the early years of the first World War – ‘a war fought...between entire societies and not just between armies’ (see: Encyclopaedia Britannica online: [http://](http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-32826)

www.britannica.com/eb/article-32826).

Of course the organisational principle of total war is different in a crucial respect from that of the total capitalism advocated by neoliberals today. Under total war, ‘in all the belligerent nations, to a greater or lesser degree, civil and economic liberties, the free market, even national sovereignty, gave way to a kind of military socialism’, with a proliferation of state agencies and controls. Under total capitalism, by contrast, the free market is the supreme value to which not just national sovereignty and civil liberties, but all public and private life, are increasingly subordinated – to the point where the distinction between public and private serves increasingly as a useful fiction. Public transport, education, health care, social services, scientific research, telecommunications, broadcasting, publishing, pensions, foreign aid, land use, water, the public infrastructure, the arts, and even policy-making itself (since it is increasingly entrusted to private sector personnel seconded into government ministries): all become subject to market-driven policy-making in the name of ‘efficiency’, and are treated more and more as fields for profitable private investment rather than as means to a better society.

The privatisation of public services is of course a cardinal principle of total capitalism, and it has been accepted (sometimes reluctantly, but all too often with a sort of born-again enthusiasm) by many politicians who consider themselves progressive.

But when any public service is privatised a lethal dynamic is set in motion – lethal, that is, to social solidarity and the basic equality of citizens on both of which democracy ultimately depends – a dynamic which few politicians seem to understand (saying things like ‘it doesn’t matter who provides the service, so long as it is paid for out of taxes,’ etc.).

For a public service to be transformed into a market, several requirements need to be met. First, the service must be reconfigured into a series of discrete elements that can be priced and sold – in a word, it must be transformed into a set of commodities. Instead of hospital care we have hundreds of treatments, or ‘finished consultant episodes,’ all priced according to their varying costs, and billed for. Second, people must be induced to want to buy the service out of their own pockets, normally by cutting the funding for non-market provision, so that its quality and accessibility decline until people are ready to pay for a market-provided alternative. Third, the workforce involved in providing the service must be transformed from one working for collective aims, with a public service ethic, to one working to produce profits for owners of capital, and subject to market discipline (typically involving less job security and more hierarchy). Fourth, the risk involved for the private corporations taking over the services must be underwritten by the state, at great public expense (anyone who thinks that the opposite is true, and that the risk is being transferred to the private sector, as proponents of PPPs claim, should take a look at the empirical evidence from a growing number of countries and sectors which shows just how erroneous that claim is).

Once the process of commodification is under way a further dynamic comes into operation – the transformation of the newly-commodified services under the pressure of competition. Competitive production always involves ‘Taylorism’ – the substitution of cheaper labour for more expensive – and standardisation of the product, in the search for scale economies. But past a certain point, services – especially all personal services, or the personal aspect of any service, such as that provided by shop-floor or counter staff – cannot generate the kind of profits that capital can earn from mass-producing material goods, and capital cannot remain in any field which returns much less than the average rate of profit; so the ultimate logic of commodification is to replace the sale of services by the sale of mass-produced material goods, and to transfer to the consumer as much as possible of whatever ‘consumption work’ is still left over from the service that was formerly provided. (The phrase is taken from Ursula Huws’ pioneering work on this subject, in *The Making of a Cybertariat*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003.) Furniture is re-designed so that it can be collected and assembled by the consumer, automatic machines replace bank tellers, computers and email accounts replace postal services, drugs and heart monitors replace nurses, check-out machines replace supermarket check-out staff and check-in machines replace airport check-in staff; there are hotels without staff, lessons without teachers, publishing houses without editors. In every case the production and consumption process is redesigned so that whatever work can’t be done mechanically is done by the consumer.

But this process radically changes the nature of services – in some cases abolishing them entirely – and public services are no exception. A consultation with a family doctor is replaced, first by a consultation with one of a changing team of doctors, and then (when a more profitable ‘skill mix’ has been installed) by a consultation with a nurse or a nurse-assistant, and finally by a phone call to a medical call-centre, where someone answers following a computerised protocol.

This involves an obvious loss of quality, to say the least, and so public services then develop in the direction of private services, i.e. with different grades of quality and accessibility, priced according to the respective cost of each level of service provided. You can still get a ‘full-service’ service, but only if you can pay for it. This is achieved initially through the introduction of fees for ‘extras’ of various kinds, but before long these extras come to include things like school books and tuition, decent hospital food, high-quality television programmes, and so on, that were originally part of the standard service provided to everybody. What remains available to those without money for extras becomes a highly standardised, residual (‘basic’) service – or it disappears entirely as a public service, and joins the mass of other private services, in which even the most basic service must be paid for.

So what began as a public service designed to fulfil a collectively-determined social or political purpose ends up as a drive to find mass-produced goods that can be sold profitably, while the public is differentiated into a hierarchy of individuals, now as unequal in this respect as they are in most others. The collective needs and universal values which the service was originally created to serve are gradually marginalised and finally abandoned. Total capitalism seeks a totally individualised population, without collective needs or universal values; for total capitalism there is, as Mrs Thatcher put it, ‘no such thing as society, only individuals and their families,’ spending their money in markets.

But can we have democracy without society – without a modicum of equality of status and condition, secured by universal public services, and a significant degree of social solidarity based on this? It seems unlikely. And can democracy survive meaningfully when the functions of the state are in effect assumed by enormous corporations, run by a small elite of enormously rich people whose supreme principle is maximising ‘shareholder value’ (including their own share options)? Worse still, is it likely that politicians in such a situation will rise to the challenge of the looming world-wide ecological crisis, when this is driven by capitalism’s dependence on indefinitely expanding consumption? Can anyone really believe it? Yet this is where total capitalism is taking us, as fast as we allow it to do so. **R**

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An Aspect of Neoliberalism

Prabhat Patnaik

The standard argument for the proposition that a capitalist class is at all socially necessary is that this class undertakes productive investment: it thereby causes the development of the productive forces, which is a condition for social progress. The social legitimacy of capitalism thus lies in the fact that capitalists undertake investment. The view that capitalists may operate enterprises better, even if this were true, will not in itself justify their social existence, if the surplus value produced under such better operation was fully or largely consumed. The better running of enterprises by capitalists will then have relevance only for their own private consumption, but none for society as a whole. It is the fact that they invest the bulk of the surplus value produced under their supervision, which provides the basis for claiming that they have social relevance, that they play a role in social advance.

True, as Marx had shown, this investment on their part is not a matter of volition. It is imposed on them by the impersonal and coercive logic of capitalism. Nonetheless it is what underlies the socially positive role claimed for them. In short, when capitalists are undertaking investment, they are simply doing what they are supposed to do, what they claim is their basic *raison d'être*; if they did not do so, they would cease to have any social legitimacy.

In the era of neoliberalism however we witness a strange spectacle: capitalists demand a social bribe even for undertaking investment. Governments have to offer them inducements in order to elicit investment from them, in the form of guaranteed rates of return, “viability gap financing” (which refers to the amount of grant made available to them by the government under the “public-private partnership”), tax exemptions, free land for their investment projects, opportunities for making capital gains through land speculation in the Spe-

cial Economic Zones, and immunity from labour laws in such zones. Demands have been made that there should be zero taxation in such zones, and now there are even demands that manufacturing as a whole should be exempted from paying any corporate income tax. This is over and above the abolition of the long-term capital gains tax which exempts capitalists from parting with even an iota of their gains from stock-market speculations, and whose proclaimed objective is to keep the boom going, ostensibly to stimulate investment.

How is it that the capitalists now feel emboldened to demand a social bribe, and an increasing one at that, even to carry out the basic task which they have always claimed is their essential social role? Two factors have contributed to this change, both characteristic of the neoliberal era. The first is the systematic, deliberate, and entirely unjustified vilification of the public sector, which was seen earlier as providing an alternative agency to the capitalists. Imperialist agencies had always indulged in such vilification from the very beginning of the era of de-colonization when a host of newly-liberated third world countries, inspired by the socialist example, had sought to build up the public sector as a bulwark against metropolitan capital; the domestic monopolists have joined this process more recently. And the entire media controlled by both, imperialism and the domestic monopolists, have gone hammer and tongues attacking the public sector, until the very term has come to be perceived as a dirty word. With the public sector discredited, there appears no alternative to the capitalists, and the pound of flesh they demand can be easily passed off as being socially necessary. The second factor is the institutionalization of a free-for-all, where state governments vie with one another for attracting private investment, and the capitalists, both domestic and foreign, are the beneficiaries of this

competitive struggle among them, with each state government outdoing the others in offering better terms.

Let us consider each of these factors. There can be scarcely any doubt that the public sector played a key role in India not only in building the productive base of the economy, but also in the achievement of whatever technological self-reliance we have. Even in the matter of efficiency of functioning, once we define the term efficiency carefully and refrain from the absurdity of treating it as being synonymous with profitability (which depends on a host of factors like pricing policy and product-mix, with regard to which the public enterprises have had to act under constraints owing to their social obligations), the public sector comes off at least as well as the private sector. Moreover, even in spheres where it has functioned comparatively poorly, the reason has often had to do with the deliberate neglect, and even subversion, by a government bent upon pursuing neoliberal policies than with any intrinsic limitations of the public sector. And yet there has been a veritable campaign against this sector, largely based on intellectual sleights-of-hand and untruths. An example of the kind of intellectual sleight-of-hand that passes for argument in this realm can be given from the supposedly intellectually “respectable” *Approach Paper* of the Planning Commission for the Eleventh Plan.

The Paper talks about the massive investment requirements for infrastructure needed in the Plan and then points out that resources on this scale cannot obviously be generated within the public sector. Hence the private sector must do the bulk of such investment, for which it must be enticed in various ways through social “bribes.” This argument appears so reasonable, and indeed so obvious, that it may pass unnoticed. But a careful look will

show that when the Paper talks about the inability of the public sector to finance such investments, it is referring to budgetary and other internal resources. But the private firms that are required to do the job instead are not supposed to be using their internal resources for it; they would be mobilizing finance from various sources. Why cannot the public sector do the same? The *Approach Paper* in other words uses the term “resources” to mean “savings” in the case of the public sector, and to mean “finance” in the case of the private sector, with a view to undermining the role of the public sector!



If the undermining of the public sector has given capitalists the upper hand, the whittling down of the bargaining strength of the state has only reinforced this process. Since capital has acquired global mobility, a nation state interested in having some investment within its shores has to compete with other nation states for attracting capital. Thus, if Indonesia, or Pakistan, or Poland, offers better terms to capital, then India willy-nilly has to follow suit. Even more pertinently, within India itself the same story gets repeated across the various state governments. Volkswagen, for instance, was simultaneously negotiating terms with the Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra governments for setting up an automobile plant. It finally went where it got the best terms. And this is what all the capitalists are doing.

One obvious implication of this is for

state finances. If tax concessions are offered then the state government’s revenue suffers. If land purchased from peasants has to be offered free to the capitalists then the state is burdened with additional expenditure. The same happens if a whole range of complementary facilities have to be made available for the project from public funds. What all this means is that the amount of funds available with state governments for expenditure on public health, public education, sanitation, and rural infrastructure dwindles. Consequently, either these sectors are neglected and the potential users, including especially the poor, are driven to

make use of private facilities in health, education etc., and to pay through their noses for doing so; or the state governments perforce turn to imperialist agencies like the DFID, ADB, JBIC, and the World Bank, who come with “aid-packages” for these sectors.

In the latter case however there are invariably “conditionalities,” like “user charges” and the removal of all existing legislation that defends the interests of the weaker sections, which also hurt the poor. These explicit, visible “conditionalities” are in addition to the implicit, invisible and potentially even more dangerous process of imperialist penetration into the bureaucracy and state administration that is facilitated through the acceptance of such “aid packages.” The social “bribe” demanded and extracted by the capitalists therefore invariably impinges on the poor and the working masses.

There is something bizarre about this phenomenon. Historically, booms under capitalism have been associated with greater, and not lesser, expenditure by the state in other directions. That is because the state shares in the boom, and its revenues and expenditures increase as a consequence. But we are having a boom at the moment that is associated with a reduced capacity of the state to spend in other directions. Since the boom itself reduces the share of the workers in output, does not give rise to larger employment, and is associated with a crisis of petty production, the fact of its also reducing the capacity of the state to spend in other directions, and hence constricting the availability of public education and health etc., has enormous significance. But this is what booms in the era of globalized finance look like.

The process of capitalists extracting social “bribes” moreover has no limits. Since the competitive struggle among state governments progressively worsens their fiscal situation, making it progressively more difficult for them to use public investment as a counterweight to the capitalists, the magnitude of social “bribes” demanded and actually extracted by the capitalists will only increase over time.

A pointer toward this tendency is the demand made in certain circles that local self-governing institutions should also be given the autonomy to borrow and to negotiate investment projects with capitalists, including multinational banks and corporations. This will further increase the mismatch in bargaining strength between the capitalists and the state organ engaged in negotiating with them, and will further intensify the competitive struggle among the aspirants for investment, namely the tinier, more fragmented and more numerous local self-governing institutions. This can have only one possible result, which is to raise the scale of social “bribes” for capitalists’ investment. This increase in the scale of social “bribes” is an important feature of neoliberalism. **R**

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The World Social Forums and Popular Struggles

Samir Amin

The undeniable success of the World Social Forums (and of the national and regional forums), from their first edition in Porto Alegre during 2001 to their seventh in Nairobi this year, shows that the formula met a real objective need, felt by many militants and movements engaged in their struggles against neoliberalism and imperialist aggression. In these struggles, movements and militants have renewed their forms of organization and active intervention in society.

Yes, the dominant political culture of the left had been marked in the 19th and 20th centuries by practices based on the hierarchical vertical organization of parties, trade unions and associations. In the circumstances of the period the movements they stimulated – radical and reformist social transformations, revolutions, national liberations – transformed the world, in a direction generally favourable to the working classes.

Nevertheless the limits and contradictions specific to these forms of action appeared strongly from the 1980-1990 period. The democratic deficiency of these forms, going as far as the self proclamation of “vanguards” armed with “scientific” knowledge and the “exclusive effective” strategy, are at the root of later disappointments: reforms and revolutions brought to power regimes for which the least that can be said is that they frequently failed to keep their promises and sometimes went in a criminal direction. These failures made possible the return to the offensive of dominant capital and imperialism as from the 1980-1990 period.

The moment of euphoria of capital and imperialism – which went onto the offensive under the banner of neoliberalism and globalization – was short lived (1990-1995). Very quickly, the working classes entered the struggle to resist this offensive.

Yes, in general, this first wave of struggle placed itself on the ground of retaliation to the offensive in all its multi-dimensionality: resistance to economic neoliberalism, to the dismantling of social benefits, to police repression, to the military aggressions of the U.S. and its allies. The chain of these grounds of resistance is continuous and, according to the local circumstances, struggles are deployed on the main grounds of the immediate challenge with which people are confronted. In this sense the demand for market regulation, the promotion of women’s rights, defence of the environment, defence of public services, as well as the armed resistance to the aggression of the United States and its allies in the Middle East (Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon) are in-dissociable from each other

In these resistance struggles the peoples have innovated. Many of the old political forces of the organized left remained aloof from these first struggles, timid in face of the aggression, sometimes won over to the liberal and imperialist options. The

movement was initiated by the ‘new forces,’ sometimes almost ‘spontaneously.’ In their deployment, these forces promoted the fundamental principle of democratic practice: refusing vertical hierarchy and promoting horizontal forms of cooperation in action. This advance of democratic consciousness must be considered as a ‘civilizational’ progress. To the extent that it is reflected in the social forums, these must therefore be considered as perfectly “useful” for the development of the struggles in progress.

The resistance struggles have recorded indisputable victories. They have initiated (but only initiated) the defeat of the offensive of capital and imperialism. The American project to control the planet militarily, which is necessary to guarantee the ‘success’ of the globalization in place, the ‘preventive’ wars conducted to ensure its effectiveness – invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, occupation of Palestine and aggression against Lebanon – have already visibly held in check the political project of imperialism.

The so-called neoliberal economic and social project, designed to provide a strong and stable base for the accumulation of capital – ensuring the maximum rate of profit at any price – is, in the opinion of the very authors of this project (World Bank, IMF, WTO, European Union) incapable of imposing its conditions. It is ‘falling apart’: the WTO’s Doha round is in an impasse, the IMF in financial collapse, etc. The menace of a sudden economic and financial crisis is on the agenda. But there is no room for self-congratulation here as the resistance remains insufficient to change the social and political balance of power in favour of the working classes and therefore remain vulnerable.

The challenge to which the struggling peoples are confronted is entirely situated in the answer they give to the question asked here: in the terms forcefully expressed by François Houtart; moving up from the collective consciousness of the challenges to the construction of the active social agents of the transformation. Obviously this challenge goes well beyond the Forums to the peoples themselves. To what extent does the collective consciousness find its expression in the Forums? It is certainly present in unequal degrees of maturity, as always in history, depending on the places and the movements concerned. But beyond this, do the Forums contribute to the necessary advance of consciousness to the construction of agents of transformation? To which extent is this collective consciousness reflected within the social forums? I will attempt to reply to this question further on.

Progress is and will be difficult. Because it implies (i) the radicalization of the struggles and (ii) their convergence in diversity (to use the formula of the World Forum for Alternatives) in joint action plans, which imply a strategic political vision, the definition of immediate and more distant objectives →



(the 'perspective' which defines the alternative). The radicalization of the struggles is not the radicalization of the rhetoric of their words, but their articulation to the alternative project which they propose to substitute for the systems of social power in place: constructing social hegemonies (class alliances and compromises) imposing themselves as alternatives to the social hegemonies in power (those of the alliances dominated by capital, imperialism and the local compradore classes in its service). Beyond a wave of "coordination" of struggles (or even simply exchanges of views) that does not enable their dispersion to be transcended (and thereby their weakness), convergence can only be the product of a 'politicization' – in the good sense of the term – of the fragmented movements. "Non-political civil society," an ideology imported straight from the United States that continues to wreak its devastation, is fighting against this demand.

Convergence in diversity and radicalization of struggles will find their expression in the unavoidable construction of stages - which some do not even wish to hear mentioned, since it appears to them synonymous with compromise and opportunism - allowing (i) advances in democratization conceived as an endless process and not as a "blue print" supplied by the model of western representative political democracy associated with (and not dissociated from) social progress, and (ii), the affirmation of the sovereignty of states, nations and peoples, imposing forms of globalization which are negotiated and not unilaterally imposed by capital and imperialism. These definitions of the content of alternative construction are certainly not accepted by all.

Some believe that democracy (multi-party system and elections) is better than nothing. However, the peoples of Asia and Africa do not appear on the whole inclined to fight for this form of democracy dissociated from social progress. They often prefer to rally para-religious/ethnic movements which have very little democracy about them. It can be regretted, but it would be better to ask the question why. Democracy can be neither exported (by Europe) nor imposed (by the United States). It can only be the product of the conquest by the peoples of the South through their struggles for social progress, as was (and is) the case in Europe.

The very mention of nation, national independence and sovereignty makes some people's skin crawl. Sovereignism is almost qualified as a vice of the past. The nation is to be thrown into the rubbish bin, moreover globalization has already made it obsolete. This thesis, which is popular among the European middle classes (for obvious reasons related to the problems of constructing the EU), finds no echo in the South (nor in the United States or Japan for that matter!).

Transformation in stages does not exclude the affirmation of the long-term prospect. For some, like the author of these lines, this transformation is that of the socialism of the 21st century; others refuse socialism, for them it is definitively polluted by its practice in the last century. But, all the same, even if the principle of convergence is accepted, its implementation will be difficult because it is a case of reconciling (i) the advances in democratic practice acquired in and by the struggles (having to abandon the

nostalgia for movements commanded by the "vanguards") (ii) the requirements of unity in action, modest or ambitious depending on the local (national) situations.

The principle of convergence is not accepted by all. Certain so-called autonomist currents, more or less inspired by post-modernist formulations, refuse it. Some go as far as maintaining that the movement, be it dispersed, is constructing the alternative by itself, going as far as claiming that the "individual subject" is already on the way to becoming the agent of the transformation (the theoretical vision of Negri). It is also of course possible not to adhere to this theoretical thesis. This is probably the case of many powerful mass movements engaged in great struggles. It can also be thought (hoped,) that organizations inherited from the past – political parties, trade unions, etc – are capable of transforming themselves in the direction of the democratic practice required. The thinkers of the autonomist currents affirm they are able to change the world without taking power. History will tell if this is possible or an illusion.

In any case, whether it is in big organizations or little ones, the conflict opposes the logic of struggle (which insists on its needs) to the logic of organization (which insists on the interests put into play by the leaderships in place or waiting to seize the leadership, the participation in the dominant power in place, and thereby encourages "opportunism").

Convergence cannot be constructed at the world or regional levels if it is not first put in place on the national levels because, whether it be wished or not, these define and manage the concrete challenges and it is at these levels that the swing in the social and political balance of power in favour of the working classes will or will not occur. The regional and world levels may reflect national advances, no doubt facilitate them (or at least not hinder them), but hardly more.

Advances opening the way to the construction of the alternative are taking place in Latin America at the moment, in contrast to their absence, or near absence, elsewhere, in Europe, Asia and Africa. These advances, in Brazil, in Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and their visible possible coming success elsewhere – Mexico, Peru, Nicaragua – are precisely the product of the rationalization of movements having reached the level of effective critical mass and their political convergence. These are revolutionary advances in the sense that they initiated the swing in the balance of social and political forces in favour of the working classes. Their success is due to their real practical answer, which associates the democracy of the management of the movements' and the political focussing of their projects, overcoming the dispersion that dominates elsewhere.

Who could deny that the state powers these advances have produced pose problems, that they risk getting bogged down under the pressure of external constraints and those of the local privileged classes? For all that, should the possibility that these changes (in power !) will open for the mass movements be spurned? These powers will allow other advances, based on the

association (and not on the dissociation) of the affirmation of national independence (vis-à-vis the United States), of democratization and social progress.

Elsewhere the image of reality, despite the struggles, is less promising. In Europe the priority given to the construction of the European Union encourages the slide towards social liberalism, the illusions kept alive by the rhetoric of the Third Way and of capitalism with a human face. Will the 'movement' succeed on its own in overcoming these handicaps? Personally I strongly doubt it and think that decisive changes in the orientation of political power is a precondition, in particular the break with Atlanticism (NATO is the enemy of the peoples of Europe). Others don't think so. In Eastern Europe, on the way to becoming (in its real relations with Germany and Western Europe) the analogue to what was (and still is) Latin America in its relations with the USA, illusions are even greater.



In Asia and Africa we are seeing excesses which we qualify as culturalist and which feed the illusion of supposedly 'civilizational' projects based on para-religious or ethnic gatherings. Here the talk of cultural diversity often comes to the help of this retreat into impasses. This talk is, moreover, perfectly tolerated (even encouraged) by the capitalist and imperialist power.

It is necessary to know more at this point - how progresses have asserted themselves in Latin America - to discover more about the reasons for the relative stagnation of the movements elsewhere and about their decline or defeat in certain cases. That should be the essential direction for numerous debates, in the Forums and elsewhere. The World Forums are meeting places and poorly equipped to provide an adequate framework for deepening these debates. The national Forums (even regional) are, or can be, more suitable.

The proposals drawn up in the Bamako Appeal (January 2006) answered, by their very intention, to the call to give more importance to deepening the debates of this nature. They are only proposals - and not imposed decisions (whoever had the audacity to do so would have no effective power to follow them up!). These were naturally refused on principle both by the extreme autonomist currents and by the mass of apolitical NGO's. But they are making their way elsewhere.

The World Social Forum Charter in no way forbids initiatives of the Bamako type, the Appeal of which was moreover endorsed by Movements' Assemblies. Nevertheless, this initiative irritated the WSF Secretariat. Why ? Perhaps because it does not share the proposals contained in this Appeal. Should it be concluded from this that the Secretariat aligned itself with apolitical NGO's (and perhaps the extreme autonomist currents) to close the Forum to other currents of action? Who would deny that the document in question - drawn up by 200 participants in one day and a night - points out inadequacies, even contradictions. Should its drafters furthermore be accused of intellectual arrogance, of outmoded vanguardist attitudes, even of dangerous political motives ? It would be necessary to show that the extremist autonomist currents produce nothing that is not the spontaneous, eloquent and coherent product of the direct expression of the masses, that the intellectuals who formulate the theses of these currents do not exist. It would be necessary to show that the apolitical NGO's do not hold views which have an obvious political sense in making their own the rhetoric of systemic institutions (reduction of poverty, good governance, exacerbated culturalism, etc).

The World Forums have a history and a prehistory. They did not appear suddenly without preparation. François Houtart, Bernard Cassen and others have recalled the essential stages of this history, from anti-Davos in Davos (1999) and other initiatives. The object of this paper is not to propose an assessment of their deployment over the last seven years. Even if

one thinks that their success is certain and their impact real (which is our case); nevertheless emphasis must be put not on self-congratulation but on the weaknesses.

The authorities responsible for the actual management of the Forums are many (Secretariat, International Council, leaderships of the principal movements and NGO's represented). They are the focuses of power, by definition and as always (and it would be naïve to ignore it). Their often-dominant concern is self assessment with respect to internal performance criteria, often of a very banal nature (quantity of participants, number, perhaps quality of the debates, direct material questions of organization). The real criterion of assessment is external to the Forums: do they contribute to facilitating the progress (rather than the stagnation, even the decline) of the struggles? It would be desirable that this dimension of the challenge find a greater echo in the assemblies and meetings organized by these authorities. →

Taking the criticism a little further we venture to say that the World Forums suffer from a (growing) imbalance in the presence of their participants. The Forums, which are costly in the extreme in money and intellectual work, disproportionately attract the NGO's (sometimes of course devoted to the support of the struggles) endowed with staff and financial means – those of the North, but also, in brutal terms, those of their clientele in the South – than the major movements in conflict. Hundreds of thousands of peasants engaged in fierce struggles, whole peoples confronting the machine guns and bombs of the imperialist occupier, sometimes make their voice heard here and there in a workshop. But many other organizations – sometimes insignificant in the scope of their action – dispose of ten workshops to make their propaganda. Let us speak frankly: some of these organizations are part of the system (and constitute safety valves) rather than being part of the alternative. The matter of the “opening of the Forums” (the principle of which must not be thrown into question) is a problem. Its management must be subject to greater attention.

These failings of the World Forums are also seen in the national Forums. But here the immediate proximity of the forces in conflict with the existing order favours, at least potentially, the overcoming of the failings mentioned here. The results – positive or less so – depend on the concrete conditions on the ground and on the nature of the handicaps (national political competition) as well as on favourable factors (radicalization of the struggles).

The reconstruction of a front of countries and peoples of the South is one of the basic conditions for the emergence of another world, which is not based on imperialist domination. Without in any way underestimating the importance of the transformations which have originated in the societies of the North in the past and present, up to now these have remained harnessed to the imperialist wagon. One should therefore not be surprised that the great global transformations have originated in the revolt of the peoples of the peripheries, from the Russian revolution (the ‘weak link’ of the period) to the Chinese revolution and the Non-Aligned front (Bandung) which, for a moment, obliged imperialism to adjust itself to demands which conflicted with the course of its expansion. This page, that of Bandung and of the Tri-continental (1955-1980), of a multi-polar globalization, has been turned.

Since the conditions of globalization preclude a remake of Bandung, the current ruling classes of the countries of the South are trying to join this globalization, which they sometimes hope to be able to change in their favour, but which they are not fighting. They divide into two groups of countries: those which have a national project, the nature of which – essentially capitalist but nuanced by concessions or their absence in favour of the working classes, but nevertheless in open or muted conflict with the imperialist strategies – may be discussed case by case, such as China or the emerging countries of Asia or Latin America; and those which have no project and agree to adjust unilaterally to the demands of the imperialist deployment (in this case they have compradore ruling classes). Variable alliances are in the process of being constituted between the states (the governments), the

emergence of which was seen within the WTO. The possibilities which these rapprochements can open up for the working class movements must not be disdained, but examined with open eyes.

Is a front of the peoples of the South, going well beyond the rapprochements between ruling classes, possible? The construction of this front remains difficult, handicapped as it is by the culturalist excesses pointed out above and the confrontations they entail between peoples of the South (on pseudo-religious or pseudo-ethnic grounds). It would be less problematic if the states would – under the pressure of their populations – evolve in a more resolutely anti-imperialist direction. That implies that their projects get out of the rut of the illusion that resolutely and exclusively “national capitalist” powers are in a position to influence imperialist globalization in their favour and to enable their countries to become active agents of imperialist globalization, participating in the fashioning of the global system (and not unilaterally adjusting to it). These illusions are still great and strengthened by nationalist rhetoric that encourages the emerging countries (in the process of “catching up”) to be developed by institutions in the service of imperialism. But to the extent that the facts refute these illusions, new popular and anti imperialist national blocks will be able to clear the way and facilitate the internationalism of peoples. It must be hoped that the progressive forces of the North will understand it and support it.

In conclusion, the future of the Forums depends less on what happens within them than what develops elsewhere, in the peoples’ struggles and in the evolution of the geo-strategy of states. This conclusion does not lead to any pessimism about the Forums, but it leads to modesty in assessing their achievements. In parallel then (and not in conflict) with the continuation of the Forums’ militant actions, other forms of intervention are necessary, allowing the deepening of the debates in view of joint actions (beyond the day of world protest against the debt, or preventive wars, or the affirmation of women’s rights, of access to water, etc).

Since its creation in 1997, the World Forum for Alternatives has been engaged on this path. It is a network of numerous “think tanks” directly articulated on social and political forces struggling against the system. It attempts to stimulate working groups (and not only exchanges of view) and facilitate joint action fronts: groups of trade unionists (“rebuilding the united labour front”), of peasants’ movements (imposing access to the land for the benefit of all peasants”), of non-aligned political forces on the global policies of capital and imperialism (working on questions of international law or the reform of the United Nations system and the economic management systems of globalization, etc). Many other national, regional and global networks are deploying praiseworthy efforts in comparable directions. We will not list them at length, but simply recall – as examples – what ATTAC represents in France, or the work of “Focus on Global South”, ARENA and so many others. In the perspective of strengthening the effectiveness of the Forums it would be highly desirable that a greater presence of these programmes be reflected in the Forums. **R**

Samir Amin, who has authored over 30 books, is a director of the Third World Forum in Dakar, Senegal.

A Socialist Life:

Harry Magdoff 1913-2006

Joseph Roberts

It is one of the ironies of recent times that the paramount imperialist power in the world should house a Marxist publishing enterprise devoted to the critique of imperialism. From its origin in 1949 a major mandate of the *Monthly Review* was critique of American global ambitions. It was Harry Magdoff's *The Age of Imperialism* in 1969 that made available the most comprehensive theoretical statement, to that date, of the political economic strategy of the new phase of American dominated imperialism.

This was another time of capitalist crisis led by the American war against Vietnam. By 1969 the war had dragged on long enough for the growth of serious opposition within the United State particularly among young people most threatened by the military draft. But there was a lack of relevant empirical, analytical and theoretical explanation to inform the opposition. The anti-war sentiment at that time could not explain what it was that motivated the American campaign since Vietnam had nothing in the way of desirable resources, nor was it in a strategically important location. Furthermore, it had recently rid itself of its French colonial masters, something the U.S. nominally endorsed by refusing to come to the aid of the encircled French at Dienbienphu. Besides, American self-image, academic rationale and official ideology at that time rejected utterly the notion of U.S. imperialism. For most of those who opposed the war the loss of South Vietnam to the Communists seemed too weak a justification for the cost in American wealth and life

Not until Harry wrote *The Age of Imperialism* was there available a systematic political economic explanation of what was at stake in the larger trajectory of U.S. policy. From a personal perspective the book was a god-send. I had recently come to Regina and initiated a class on what was called in conventional scholarship the economic theory of imperialism. The MR publication was a text and lesson to me in clear, reasoned presentation. More important it constituted an important step beyond the classic Leninist formulation of the theory of capitalist imperialism. The economic content, the relation of state and corporate forces, the international relations among rivals that constituted the causal explanations within pre-World War I theory (largely unchanged) were now recast without the deterministic historical outcome of world revolution. This was a powerful example of Western Marxism; undogmatic, unsectarian analysis but strategically critical.

Thenceforth Harry continued to update the analysis of developing capitalist imperialism by charting changes in the structure, processes and relations within and among capitalist institutions. He highlighted the mechanism whereby the centre, principally the U.S. financial institutions, extracted surplus value from the periphery while at the same time providing loans and aid funds to "developing nations" thus subordinating post-colonial and

other "Third World" countries that could never keep up with debt payments. Harry was an early analyst to identify the shift from finance capital to financial capital: the rising and presently paramount role of finance in global capital accumulation.

Monthly Review as a publishing project has always depended on a network of friends and acquaintances bound together in a common body of convictions that long pre-date its creation. Harry, like Leo Huberman, one of the original founders, came from the first generation of educated Jewish radicals. He was born in the Bronx to working class Russian émigrés as Europe was about to begin the Great War. He was able to enter City College of New York in 1931 because tuition was free to New Yorkers. Before long he was editor of the student newspaper. Astonishingly in today's university world he was enrolled in engineering, math and physics classes but still managed to earn the wrath of the administration for his political activism and published views. Though he was dismissed from CCNY at the beginning of the great depression he married his school mate Beatrice (Beadie) Greizer who would share his life-long socialist goals and give birth to two sons. Harry enrolled in New York University and graduated in 1936 with a BS in economics.

It is well known that the economic crisis of the Thirties in the U.S., unlike most other capitalist countries, gave rise to a reformist government that christened itself the New Deal. For radicals like Harry and reformers like J.K. Galbraith the Roosevelt administration offered opportunity for meaningful employment tackling the chaos of protracted and deep depression. Harry worked variously for the Works Progress Administration and the National Defense Advisory Board. With the entry in 1941 of the U.S. into the European war he was moved to the War Production Board. He was made responsible for inspection, control and planning of factories producing machine tools. Here he was immersed in the planning process of a vast national project from which he learned important lessons that would inform his views about what could be done, under the right conditions, to make the economy work for social benefit.

In 2005, in "Approaching Socialism" (MR57:3, p.53) with son Fred, Harry returned to this wartime experience. After describing how a difficult production roadblock was overcome by taking the human element into consideration the authors say "the skepticism that people feel about the efficacy or even possibility of central planning admits only the shortcomings while denying the achievements. There is nothing in central planning that requires commandism and confining all aspects of planning to the central authority. Planning for the people has to involve the people. Plans of regions, cities and towns need the active involvement of local populations, factories and stores in worker and community →

councils.” This attitude (indeed the entire article published just six months before his death) expresses the fundamental democracy within Harry’s life long commitment to socialism.

In 1944 Harry was made the chief economist in the Department of Commerce, responsible for the Current Business Analysis Division. In this capacity he learned the system of research and publishing conducted by the Department which would assist him greatly in his access to data later to be used in his discussions of imperialism. To illuminate his theoretical arguments he would skillfully employ charts, graphs and tables, often assembled himself from official government publications, always with explanations and cautions to the reader. A further promotion made him special assistant to Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace. In the 1948 election Wallace ran as presidential candidate for the short lived Progressive Party, a casualty of the Cold War.

The rapid transition at the close of World War II from ally to enemy of the Soviet Union meant the New Deal receptiveness to reformers and radicals was quickly abandoned in favour of repression. Harry, like Carl Marzani, Owen Latimer, Robert Oppenheimer and scores of others went from loyal, dedicated administrators and researchers in the war against fascism, to hounded, presumed traitors – architects of what Richard Nixon called “twenty years of treason.” The emerging military, industrial complex was on its way to eradicating the New Deal. Called before successive Congressional committees to answer questions about his political views, Harry refused to be a “friendly witness” and was thereby blacklisted for any government or academic employment.

Now, like many in the same predicament, with a wife and two children, finding a job was essential. His economics profession allowed him to find work in Wall Street as financial analyst and stockbroker. Hollywood actors and writers blacklisted in similar circumstances were known to make successful transitions in real estate and other commercial employment. Others, using pseudonyms earned their livings by writing film scripts, mysteries, novels and advertising copy. During this period Harry’s financial services included advice to administrators of union pension funds.

Later in the decade of the fifties Harry joined the academic publishing firm of Russell and Russell, respected for their reprinting of important historical works. One of those for which he was responsible was the republication of W.E.B. Dubois’s *Black Reconstruction in America*. During this period, at their 84 St. apartment off Central Park West, he and Beadie regularly entertained dinner guests from the academic world, the arts and publishing, civil libertarians as well as visitors from abroad. One such was H.H. Wilson, outspoken critic of the McCarthy crowd, who led a beleaguered existence teaching at Princeton. I benefited from that relationship though I did not realize it at the time.

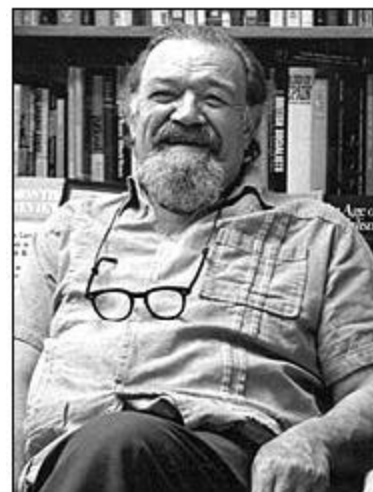
Harry had become a board member of the Rabinowitz Foundation. In 1960 when I wanted to accompany my then wife on her anthropology field trip to West Africa, Wilson suggested I apply

to the Rabinowitz Foundation for funding. It was one of the few private foundations with a board of liberal and left members and not infiltrated with CIA operatives. To my surprise I got a munificent grant. Later I would learn this was due to Harry’s support. From that year and half in the newly “independent” country of Sierra Leone I learned graphically what imperialism is.

His own career took him into academia briefly when he taught first at the New School for Social Research in New York and then at Yale. But the practical education represented by *Monthly Review* was more attractive and when Leo Huberman died Harry accepted Paul Sweezy’s invitation to join MR as associate editor in 1969.

This step was not taken lightly for Harry had by now enough experience on the left and in publishing to know some of the pitfalls that would likely be in store. At the time of Paul’s ninetieth birthday Harry wrote about his anguish at the invitation to join the editorship of MR. Sweezy’s invitation intrigued but also disturbed him. “I had spent years struggling against the odds to make a living in the environment of great fear produced by the mania of anti-communism. Shortly before Paul’s invitation, however, I managed to free myself from the chains of commerce; the opportunity opened up for independent study and writing to make up for the wasted years. ... But I was troubled by doubts about my own adequacy for the work and fearful of the frictions and tensions so common to partnerships. I had seen too much storm and strife in political as well as business partnerships – tensions and splits not only over substantive matters, but also because of the clash of egos.”

At *Monthly Review* Harry quickly became occupied with the precarious finances of that always uncertain enterprise. Although the staff, most of whom had joined the publication at the start in 1949, were loyal, dedicated and capable, important decisions at MR were made by a board which included long time associates as well as the editors, but not the staff. With crisis again threatening in the mid 90s a major reorganization was prescribed by Harry. As he said, the Board of Directors was presented with a “...cash flow analysis which showed we were in danger of becoming bankrupt by March or April of 1996.” The alternatives proposed included closing the book publishing and continuing only the journal, or fire almost all the workers, continuing modest book publishing and subcontracting marketing and related tasks. “Paul and I felt



Harry Magdoff

that we needed to look for ways to keep the book business going, but in no way would we be party to breaking a union contract. Meanwhile, the staff was apprised of the situation and the proposals. From them came first a critique of the way things were done in the past [and] a proposal for self-management. ... There is much satisfaction in observing worker self-management taking shape."

But not all the inevitable conflicts of a successful publishing house could be resolved amicably. In 2000, after three years of trial, the co-editor relation with Ellen Meiksins Wood ended when she was asked to resign to the dismay of many Canadian supporters. By this time Paul Sweezy no longer played an active role and Harry was the principal editor. As Harry explained, he simply could not work with her; their personalities were too disparate.

Like Paul, Harry was generous with his support of students, individuals embarking on activist efforts, and socialist groups. The posture of the *Monthly Review* had from the start been that they would work with anyone who wished to work with them. Harry conducted a voluminous correspondence with socialist and interested inquirers the world over. They both attended international meetings of socialists and helped launch the Socialist Forum in New York. In 1992 he answered the request of our Society for Socialist Studies to join the Learned Societies congress in Charlottetown where, at their own expense, he was our keynote speaker. He and Beadie enlivened meetings and social occasions memorably.

One can get an idea of Harry's Marxism by reading his evaluation of another Marxist economist, Paul Baran, author of *The Political Economy of Growth*. In a 1965 portrait of Baran published by *Monthly Review*, Harry wrote, "(n)ot only did he absorb Marx's analyses, but he learned from Marx how to ask the important questions and how to seek out the significant relationships among the infinitude of economic and social phenomena. Confronted with changes in monopoly capitalism, in imperialism, and in the construction of socialism, he did not hunt up and rely on the appropriate quotations. Instead, he asked: how would a

Marx tackle this problem? This meant persistent grappling and struggle with new facts and new theories to discover the significant and the relevant. It also meant a continuous re-examination of Marxist hypotheses in the light new facts and developments."

Harry's own values are illustrated in his quote from Baran's own article "The Commitment of the Intellectual" (MR: May 1961): "An intellectual is thus in essence a social critic, a person whose concern is to identify, to analyze, and in this way to help overcome the obstacles barring the way to the attainment of a better, more humane, and more rational social order."

Harry's penchant for technical precision in the service of rigorous analysis is again revealed in his observation that "while Baran appreciated the formal procedures of the typical academic study of economics and even enjoyed the aesthetics of mathematical reasoning, he did not pursue these lines of inquiry because in the main they do not lead to further understanding of the important issues of capitalist society and are too often a way to avoid the issues. Perfecting even such important tools of modern analysis as input-output and linear programming could contribute to greater efficiency of a planned economy, but would have little importance in transforming an irrational society into a rational one." "What social science needs is less elaborate techniques and more courage to tackle, rather than dodge, the central issues." (Baran's epigraph from J.D. Bernal in *The Political Economy of Growth*)

While the left has lost a great opponent of imperialism and life long socialist his heritage continues in the work of others such as Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin. Their own studies and theoretical insights into evolving imperialism owe much to the work of Harry Magdoff. He is missed but celebrated in our active memory. **R**

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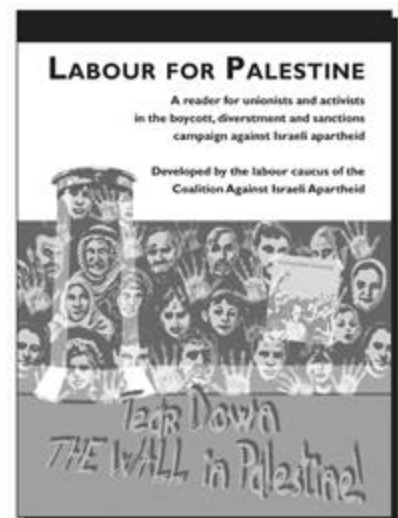
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Ontario Budget 2007: Liberals Not in a Hurry

Bryan Evans



The \$88.8 billion budget tabled by Ontario's Minister of Finance Gregory Sorbora on March 22 was a demonstration of pre-election political marketing. It is also a continuation of the broad policy strokes embedding the neoliberal project in Canada's largest province. This is a Janus-faced budget if there ever was one as it attempts to look in two directions at once. The budget's very title, "Investing in People, Expanding Opportunity," provides a progressive patina masking a failure to address seriously major social issues. The day following the budget a taped telephone message from the premier, Dalton McGuinty, was dispatched across the province. McGuinty intoned that "this was a very liberal budget." The marketing of what is a remarkably conservative budget as the expression of a forward thinking and progressive agenda was well underway.

The budget had three central features. These initiatives provide the appearance of an anti-poverty agenda in terms of the minimum wage, child poverty, and housing.

MINIMUM WAGE OR LIVING WAGE?

That the minimum wage issue found such a central place in the most significant statement of priorities of any government is noteworthy. It is the most politically interesting aspect of this

budget. The last time the minimum wage question was the subject of such public debate was in the mid-1970s when Ontario NDP Leader Stephen Lewis came under attack, and consequently 'waffled', on his party's commitment to substantially increase the minimum wage. His equivocation cost his party its Official Opposition status. Thirty years later, in a quite different economic and political context and with much public pressure, a Liberal government is claiming this issue as a central feature of its agenda.

A series of events unfolded which placed the question of the lowest paid back at the centre of political contest. The Toronto and York Region Labour Council launched their "Million Reasons Why" campaign more than a year ago which sought to bring prominence to the stark reality that in the Greater Toronto Area a million workers do not earn enough to lift them out of poverty. Similarly, the UNITE-HERE workers have been waging an effective and sophisticated campaign to improve the wages and working conditions of service sector workers for whom the state regulated minimum wage is an important floor. The election of New Democrat Cheri DiNovo in a Toronto by-election was also a turning point. Her first initiative as a new MPP was to introduce a private members bill to increase the minimum wage to \$10/hour immediately. NDP MP Peggy Nash, representing the same Toronto area as DiNovo, was raising the same theme in national politics.

Subsequently, in the York-South Weston by-election, a working class constituency which is home to large numbers of immigrants and racialized minorities in the far west-end of Toronto, the minimum wage issue resonated strongly. Adding fuel to the byelection battle was the fact that the members of the Ontario Legislature, over the objection of the NDP, had just voted themselves a 25 per cent pay increase. The result was what had been a safe Liberal seat was won by the New Democrat by doubling the party's popular vote. Suddenly, deteriorating conditions of work and the growing gap between rich and poor was on the political agenda.

In response to DiNovo's bill, the Liberals offered the hackneyed arguments dating back decades that such a move would increase unemployment among the most vulnerable. Based on this view, their budget proposal to increase the minimum wage to \$10.25 per hour is to be phased in by 2010. They even hauled out the venerable University of Toronto labour economist Morley Gunderson to conduct, for the princely sum of \$24,000, yet another study to confirm the government's neoliberal cautions. While Gunderson's review of the literature concluded that a less employment would result from the increase, he also wrote that "it is important to emphasise that zero employment effects are sometimes found in some of the econometric specification." In fact, there is no bulk of empirical evidence that rising minimum wages will cause unemployment or that cutting them will increase employment.

Ontario has been increasingly developing a low wage economy. Sufficient jobs are not being created for even those who have education and training. Even at \$9.00 an hour, the minimum wage will be at parity, inflation accounted for, with what it was in 1994. That was 13 years ago. And fully implemented in 2010, the government's \$10.25 minimum wage will be merely 9% above that 1994 high!

There is no comprehensive and meaningful anti-poverty agenda to be found from Ontario Liberal government. Such a program would require job creation programs, an expansion of the public sector, massive intervention in the housing market, and facilitating unionisation, perhaps even considering a form of broader-based bargaining where entire industrial sectors, union or non-union, to have the terms of a collective agreement applied to them.

POOR CHILDREN HAVE POOR PARENTS

Over the past decade, the public anti-poverty policy debate has most often delinked parents from children, wanting somehow to only address children. This in part speaks to the ongoing currency of the Victorian-era view of poverty as a result of personal moral failure, a failure which cannot be applied to innocent children. The 2007 Ontario budget has as its only new initiative the Ontario Child Benefit. This new program will eventually benefit 1.3 million children. However, it will be implemented over five years. In other words, in the year 2011, the program will be fully rolled out at a cost of \$2.1 billion. The maximum benefit will be \$1,100/year.

There is not a reference anywhere to child care – something which low income parents would find most helpful. As for general social assistance rates for welfare recipients, they are to rise an unhelpful 2 percent. There is a nod of the head and some pocket change for affordable housing totalling less than \$400 million again to be rolled out over five years. But in Toronto alone the wait is five to ten years for a space in subsidized housing.

PUBLIC HEALTH CARE: GROWING, GROWING, GONE

With the 2007 budget, spending on health care will account for 40.55 of all Ontario expenditures. This is up from 36.3% in 2001/02. Sixty-five per cent of all new revenues in 2003/07 have been allocated to the health care envelope. Growth in health care spending in 2006/07 will be nearly 10% larger than the year before. Clearly this is a substantial and important part of our public sector and a key pillar in what remains of our 'welfare state.' Or is it?

Every year the Minister of Finance commits to constrain health care expenditures and every year expenditures are larger than forecast. All this while question of accessibility and quality loom large. This may well be a recipe for the unravelling of the political consensus around publicly financed health care as the more affluent and influential seek to escape. For Ontario the demands will grow as the population expands, grows older, and the well-documented (please no more studies!!) impact of growing economic insecurity and polarization on health status take their toll.

The primary beneficiaries of the health care 'industry' are the pharmaceutical companies and a medical profession where a culture and practice of entrepreneurship holds. Unless there is a commitment to take these interests to task there will be no capacity to fund anything other than health care in twenty years.

GOING NO WHERE FAST

Former Prime Minister Mackenzie King used to describe Canada's social democrats as "Liberals in a hurry." With this budget we know very well that Liberals must be historically wedded to taking the scenic route. Indeed, as the title of the budget indicates, there was an 'opportunity' here to be bold and imaginative. With a \$300 million surplus this year, a projected \$400 million surplus next year, and an additional nearly \$500 million in unallocated new federal transfers for housing and child care, there was room to do more. What this budget truly represents is two things. It is a political response aimed at defusing the mild resurgence of the NDP in opinion polls, fuelled by an uneven but still real growing working class anger. And the continued managed decline, from a high wage economy to a polarized high income financial sector and a low-wage retail and servant sector, by the ruling classes of Ontario. **R**

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Supreme Court Strikes at Canada's Secret Trials and Detentions

Matthew Behrens

"In a constitutional democracy, governments must act accountably and in conformity with the Constitution and the rights and liberties it guarantees.... Security concerns cannot be used to excuse procedures that do not conform to fundamental justice."

-Chief Justice C.J. McLachlin, *Charkaoui v. Canada*

The campaign to end secret trials in Canada received a significant boost on February 23, 2007 when the Supreme Court of Canada ripped the heart out of Canada's security certificate regime. While government spokespeople reassured the media that the decision actually upheld the process, there is no doubting that the two key portions of the scheme, as set out in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) – the process for determining the "reasonableness" of a security certificate, and the section dealing with automatic, mandatory detention and the obstacles to release on bail – were both found to violate the basic principles of fundamental justice and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (notably the Section 7 guarantee of life, liberty, and security of the person).

Writing the unanimous decision, Chief Justice C.J. McLachlin declared: "I conclude that the IRPA unjustifiably violates Section 7 of the Charter by allowing the issuance of a certificate of inadmissibility based on secret material without providing for an independent agent at the stage of judicial review to better protect the named person's interests. I also conclude that some of the time limits in the provisions for continuing detention of a foreign national violate [various Charter rights] because they are arbitrary."

The Court gave Parliament one year to draft something new, thus leaving those subject to the process in a legal limbo. Currently, five men are out on bail (four under virtual house arrest), and one man remains detained at the Kingston-area facility dubbed Guantanamo North. All are fighting deportation to torture. After one year, those whose certificates have been upheld can apply to have them quashed. In the meantime, anyone subject to certificates will have the right to a review of detention both before and after a certificate reasonableness hearing.

The challenge for opponents of secret trials will be to remain vigilant, because we still have a long way to go, though the road has certainly been made easier with the positive court decision. We need to continue the struggle to fully free those subject to the process and to clear their names, and to end the process of deportation to torture (an issue yet to be settled by the country's highest court). We also need to watch out that CSIS does not issue new certificates to justify the existence of the process.

SECRET TRIAL OPPONENTS RENEW CALL FOR COMPLETE REPEAL OF SECURITY CERTIFICATES

Equally important is to not become complacent and feel that the Court has settled the issue. Security certificates must be abolished. A process now found to be fundamentally flawed and unfair by Canada's highest court cannot be fixed with a few fancy sounding additions like "security-cleared lawyers" and "special advocates." We need to stop Parliament from enacting a "new and improved" secret trial process which, to their minds, will comply with Charter Rights. (After all, it was Parliament that enacted secret trials in the first place which, to their mind, also complied with such rights. We don't want new targets of CSIS to go through this process all over again!)

Rather, it is time to fully repeal the legislation and demand that if the government has security concerns about an individual, charges should be brought, and disclosure provided, in an open, fair, transparent process. The men subject to secret trials have called for nothing less throughout their years of detention and house arrest.

That call was repeated in a press conference by the man whose case started the Supreme Court challenge, Adil Charkaoui. Speaking in Montreal, Charkaoui told reporters: "I want justice, I'm not asking about anything else. I want to clear my name and to be respected like a human being, to be treated like any citizen. I am not a terrorist. Now, if they say I am, let them prove it before the courts. The harassment from CSIS, it's from 1999, the day I asked for Canadian citizenship. Eight years. They tried everything, but they didn't try the justice. We have the criminal courts in this country. If they have something against me, charge me."

Security certificates have been controversial measures designed to detain non-citizens on the basis of secret evidence, without charge, for indefinite periods of time. They have drawn criticism from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, MPs of all parties, and three separate committees of the United Nations. The campaign to oppose them has been nationwide, with vigils, sympathy hunger strikes, and endless lobbying and public education to bring what was a very hidden issue to national exposure.

McLachlin pointed out that "the secrecy required by the scheme denies the person named in a certificate the opportunity to know the case put against him or her, and hence to challenge the government's case. This, in turn, undermines the judge's ability to come to a decision based on all of the relevant facts and law." Indeed, she points out, "without knowledge of the information put against him or her, the person named in a certificate may

not be in a position to raise legal objections relating to the evidence, or to develop legal arguments based on the evidence. If s. 7 is to be satisfied, either the person must be given the necessary information, or a substantial substitute for that information must be found. The IRPA provides neither.”

She also points out that “the named person is not given the disclosure and the right to participate in the proceedings that characterize the adversarial process. The result is a concern that the designated judge, despite his or her best efforts to get all the relevant evidence, may be obliged – perhaps unknowingly – to make the required decision based on only part of the relevant evidence...The result is that, at the end of the day, one cannot be sure that the judge has been exposed to the whole factual picture...The named person is, to be sure, permitted to make legal representations. But without disclosure and full participation throughout the process, he or she may not be in a position to put forward a full legal argument...a fair hearing requires that the affected person be informed of the case against him or her, and be permitted to respond to that case.”

‘SPECIAL ADVOCATES’ ARE WINDOW-DRESSING

In an interview with CBC’s *The House*, a former UK special advocate, Ian Macdonald, described the system as marked by “a lack of fairness.... I resigned in the end because I was giving legitimacy to a system which in conscience I thought was completely contrary to all the kinds of traditions of, a) fairness, and b) the fact that ever since Magna Carta, we don’t imprison people unless they’ve had a proper trial. The trouble with this kind of what I would call indefinite detention based on suspicion is that you don’t actually involve the police. You’re simply doing it on the basis of intelligence reports you’ve had which in turn will be based on assessments made about the risks that these people may pose but without ever attempting to turn the information and suspicions you have into the kind of evidence which you could then put before a court.”

The danger that lies ahead is whether Parliamentarians will actually confront the blanket claims of national security which continue to be used in a variety of cases or simply try and find some form of accommodation with an unjust procedure. A Spring 2007 report of the House Standing committee on public safety and national security produced a chilling report in which it recommended creation of a body of security-cleared lawyers to deal with any situation in which the government claims the need to invoke secrecy. What will be advertised as a new layer of watchdog bureaucracy will in fact simply open the door to government abuse and the spread of secrecy throughout any hearing where claims of national security are raised.

For those whose lives have been so dramatically affected by the process, the sting of house arrest continues. Those now transferred out of Guantanamo North must consent to phone taps, mail opening, arbitrary visits by government agents, approval of all visits, applications to walk outside with their kids, electronic monitoring devices, video surveillance of home entrances, and a host of other repressive measures.

Their conditions of detention will be subject to periodic court review. In addition to dealing with such onerous conditions, the detainees are now fighting to prevent deportation to torture in Egypt, Syria, Morocco, and Algeria. Canadian officials are working hard to prop up the illegitimate regime of “diplomatic assurances” – promises from torture that torture will not be used – to try and execute the deportations. **R**

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These paragraphs are extremely important, because it is unclear how having a security-cleared lawyer will change the unjust nature of this situation. Suppose the case against you remains secret but you have a security cleared lawyer; if you do not know the case, how do you instruct your counsel? In cases where the security-cleared lawyer normally sees the secret evidence, that lawyer is not able to subsequently consult with the detainee. Thus, while we are left with the perception that the detainee has an advocate, it remains the fact that, despite the advocate’s best efforts and intentions, the detainee is still at a huge disadvantage in what remains a star chamber process.

To stay in touch, contact Campaign to Stop Secret Trials in Canada by phone (416) 651-5800, email tasc@web.ca or web: www.homesnotbombs.ca.

Afghanistan:

The Kandahar Mission One Year Later

Richard Harding

“After all, if we fail the Afghan people, we will be failing ourselves. For this is the United Nations’ strongest mission and, therefore, our greatest test. Our collective will and credibility are being judged. We cannot afford to fail. We will succeed.” – Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Speech to the United Nations, September 21, 2006.

“You see this grenade? It is with me always. If anyone tries to capture me, I will kill them and myself.” – Abu Jamal, Moroccan mujahadeen in Afghanistan, September 2004.

It is one year since Canadian soldiers moved into the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar province of Afghanistan and were placed under the operational command of the U.S.’s Operation Enduring Freedom. Before the assumption of responsibility in the southern province was passed on to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) under NATO on July 31, the Canadians would suffer numerous casualties, including an axe attack in the village of Shinkay. The stridency displayed by Stephen Harper in his September address to the UN has been more than matched by that of the resistance to the foreign occupation of Afghanistan. The Canadian soldiers have been deployed under the rubric of bringing “democracy and safety” to the region. But it is Harper’s and the Canadian ruling class’s embrace of the U.S. imperial project in Afghanistan that lies at the heart of the Canadian mission and the Afghan resistance.

THE INSURGENCY

Following the resistance in Iraq, Afghan guerillas have made great use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). By far the most lethal of the insurgents’ weapons, IEDs can be comprised of old artillery shells (ubiquitous in Afghanistan) or other explosives. IEDs are often detonated by remote control, sewing fear in soldiers moving along Afghanistan’s roads, often on re-supply missions. According to a September 2006 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), up until that date more Canadian Forces personnel had died of IEDs than in direct combat with Taliban forces. Canadian government spokespeople like to call the use of these weapons ‘cowardly’. But they are an example of the ingenuity of the insurgency to wage guerilla warfare, striking NATO forces when and where they are vulnerable without suffering casualties themselves.

Suicide bombers are, perhaps, the most gruesome and the greatest psychological weapon available to the insurgents. They unnerve even the most combat seasoned soldier. In August of

2006, Canadian soldiers in Kandahar, spooked by a suicide bombing which killed one service member and wounded three others, killed an Afghan boy who came too close to their security perimeter. A few days later the Canadians opened fire on and killed an Afghan police officer and wounded two motorcyclists who approached them at speed. By September of 2006, five Canadian soldiers had died from such attacks. More would follow as the year dragged on, until the numbers went well over 50 by April of 2007.

One of the most disturbing threats that the Canadian Forces have faced in Afghanistan has been so-called friendly fire attacks by U.S. air power. In fact, as the CCPA report points out, as many Canadians have died in U.S. air strikes (April 2002, and September 2006) as were lost in four attacks by suicide bombers. This speaks to the random careless bombing of NATO forces that has killed thousands of Afghani civilians. As Canadian troops moved into Kandahar they would face increased threat in the form of direct combat with insurgents.

OPERATION MEDUSA

In September of 2006, after Operation Medusa, a major effort to push the Taliban forces from the Southeastern Kandahar province, Major Todd Strickland, deputy commander of the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia’s Light Infantry, admitted the tenacity and increasing professionalism of the insurgents. He went as far to point out that the Taliban were not the only resistance Canadian forces have been facing in Afghanistan, mentioning “police of questionable loyalty,” drug dealers, and other corrupt officials as obstacles to securing the region. Medusa ran from September 4 until September 17; four Canadian soldiers lost their lives, nine were injured. NATO leaders claimed up to one thousand Taliban deaths, but admitted that this was only a “tactical defeat” for the insurgency. During Medusa some fifty Afghan civilians died, and 80,000 were displaced.

As the operation unfolded, Canadians were treated to a propaganda offensive to build ideological support for the Afghanistan mission. This was both for the difficult fighting underway in the Kandahar region, and building a long-term military commitment that the NATO occupation was going to require. Defence Minister Gordon O’Connor was the first off the mark. He inadvertently admitted at the beginning of September that the Taliban could not be militarily defeated. Yet, he went on to admonish NATO allies for not equally sharing the military load in Afghanistan in what was likely to be a long deployment.

A few days later, on the fifth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center attacks, Prime Minister Harper, in a grotesque display of moral theatrics aimed at justifying mounting Canadian casualties in Afghanistan, surrounded himself with relatives of the twenty-four Canadians who died in New York. He declared that “these horrors cannot be stopped unless some among us are willing to accept enormous sacrifice and risk to themselves.” On September 18, in an interview with the CBC’s Peter Mansbridge, Harper would continue to cheer on the fighting, stressing how combat with the Taliban was making the Canadian Forces “a better military.” He then also took a swipe at NATO allies for not sending more forces to Kandahar to engage the insurgency. Speaking before the UN General Assembly in September, Harper further trumpeted the UN role in the War on Terrorism, Afghanistan’s significance to it, Canada’s dedication to the mission and its support for the “democratically elected government of Afghanistan.”

Following the PM’s lead, the dullard Foreign Affairs Minister, Peter MacKay, piped in while also on his way to a September UN General Assembly meeting, that “We’ve said all along that we’re there to finish the job...Will we be there five years? Will we be there longer? That remains to be seen. I would certainly defer to General Hillier as far as his assessment on the ground.” For his part, Chief of Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, has been the most public champion of Canada’s role in Afghanistan, the subordination of Canadian military doctrine to that of the U.S., and the increased militarization of Canada’s foreign policy.

The propaganda campaign even brought the Afghanistan puppet President Hamid Karzai to Ottawa in late September. In speaking before parliament, Karzai addressed Canadian deaths in Afghanistan – 36 soldiers and one diplomat at this point – directly: “Yes, it is sad but it is worth it...in Afghanistan you are not only serving the cause of security for the international community and your country. You are also helping one of the oppressed societies in the world and the little children that they have.” For this, he was awarded a standing ovation, nicely ignoring that his government contains Northern Alliance warlords with records of human rights violations, and other equally sordid characters. The Karzai visit coincided with a “Wear Red Friday” rally on Parliament Hill in support of, as Harper put it, “soldiers like the ones fighting in Afghanistan.”

AFTER MEDUSA

The Canadian Government would continue to beat the war drums until the end of 2006 and into 2007. In November NATO meetings, Canada began another effort to push NATO allies for more offensive deployments. France and Germany were specially targeted due to their unwillingness to provide more troops for Afghanistan and their reluctance to move resources into the Kandahar hot zone in favour of the relatively quiet capital of Kabul.



Ottawa announced that reinforcements would be sent to Afghanistan in the form of additional troops and fifteen Leopard C2 main battle tanks. These came complete with MEXAS (Modular Expandable Armour System) armour and advanced fire control upgrades, (but without air conditioning for the crews in operating them in the blazing Afghan heat). The price tag was \$180 million, not including the \$1 million a piece transportation cost to the theatre of operations. The amount of spending on this one-time injection of fire-power amounted to a more than a quarter of what Ottawa pledged to Afghanistan over ten years for development aid. The addition of the Leopards, which had been slated to be sold or scraped in favour of a wheeled gun carrier, represented more than the government’s determination to up the ante in Afghanistan. It was also evidence of the way the Afghan mission, and the wider War on Terror, was now dictating the Department of National Defence’s priorities in terms of equipment procurement. The tallies for the Canadian Afghan deployment to a forward combat position, and the long-term commitment beginning to form in the Canadian state, are only starting to come in.

CHAOS AND COMMITMENTS

The Taliban, however, were less than intimidated by Canada’s blustering politicians or its old and new war machines. On December 3, 2006, they launched rockets at the Canadian tanks’ forward operating base in Ma’sum Gar. For the first time in fifty years, Canada’s major armour was engaged in direct confrontation. A suicide bomber would soon attack a convoy returning to Kandahar from the Panjwaii district where the Leopards are stationed.

These early skirmishes were but a small part of the chaos beginning to envelop southern Afghanistan, as the local Afghani Pashtun population increasingly turned away from the →

NATO forces and the Taliban gained additional strength. In February, approximately 100 Taliban fighters defeated local forces and took possession of the town of Musa Qala in Helmand province and hoisted their flag. This event took place just as a U.S. General was taking command of NATO forces in Afghanistan. This was only the initial stage of the anticipated Taliban spring offensive. Rumours abound that this may include up to two thousand suicide bombers.

There is no question that the escalating Afghan resistance means that Canadian Forces in Afghanistan will have their hands full in 2007. Things will not likely get better. The Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, in its February 2007 report titled *"Canadian Troops in Afghanistan: Taking a Hard Look at A Hard Mission,"* points out:

"Afghans have, over centuries, proven themselves to be fierce fighters particularly when confronting invaders from outside cultures. They repeatedly defeated the British during the 19th century 'Afghan Wars' when Britain was the world's dominant military power, and they routed the Soviets during the 1980s when the Soviet Union was the world's second most dominant military power. Superior military technology does not always win the day, particularly in an era when suicide bombing and Improvised Explosive Devices have proven themselves to be very effective tools in this kind of war. Afghans are used to killing and being killed. Their society has been in a state of war for most of the last two centuries."

The Senators were at least honest enough to highlight many of the shortcomings of the Canadian commitment in Afghanistan: the corruption of the Karzai government; the repeated failures of NATO military forces to secure the country, including the Canadian deployment in Khandahar; and the abysmal lack of development funds and initiatives. But they, too, invoke the same dogmatism as Harper and others to justify Canada's role:

"Firstly, we have international allies that we need to support. Following the attacks on 9/11, Canada made a commitment to its fellow NATO member-states to assist in securing and re-building Afghanistan not only for the sake of international peace and security, but also for the safety and security of Canadians. Secondly, as one of the richest countries in the world, we cannot stand idly by and fail to help one of the poorest countries in the world."

In criticism of Washington's role in the Afghan disaster, all the senators could muster was an echo the U.S. Secretary of



State's, Condoleezza Rice, comments on how Washington "abandoned" Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal. This leaves out not only the NATO involvement in the creation of the militant Islamic forces in the region through the 1980s, but also the American involvement in the country's post-Soviet occupation descent into chaos. This included the elder George Bush's gift of 7,000 tons of captured Iraqi armaments to Mujahideen allies while they shelled Kabul's civilians.

FROM BAD TO WORSE

The fate of the Canadian deployment has hardly gotten better. The fighting in the first weeks of April has, indeed, suggested that the capacity of the resistance has been gaining. Firefights, rocket attacks, ambushes, IEDs, and suicide bombings have all intensified. The flag-draped coffins of dead Canadian soldiers coming home has also reflected the new capacity. Six soldiers from the Royal Canadian Dragoons were killed on April 11 in the Zhari District of Khandahar as their LAV was blown up while on a reconnaissance mission. The carnage and deaths will keep piling up into the summer.

The military quagmire in Afghanistan has been matched only by the political mess. The ethically bankrupt Karzai government is spinning more out of control as the various warlord, drug, and comprador factions gain greater operating capacity and political antagonism increase. Development money transfers enter into one gigantic Kabul sinkhole at the heart of the government. Despite formal opposition from the Canadian and U.S. governments, the Karzai regime has opened various discussions with the Taliban. This partly reflects the stalemate, but also that Afghan military and police do not want to fight the Taliban directly in the south. It is a NATO war there, and it is beginning to look like a permanent war and occupation. Few now think that the Taliban – and the wider Pashtun resistance – can be defeated.

The planned Canadian withdrawal from the Kandahar deployment – under NATO terms the Canadian government has publicly stated it will stay at least until 2009 – is becoming chimerical. The

U.S. is seeking greater commitments of funds, troops and military equipment to the region from Canada. The dogmatic Harper and the bumbling O'Connor have been falling in step with the beat of the U.S. war drums. Indeed, Defence Minister O'Connor announced in April that Canada would be acquiring 120 additional tanks for \$650 million for the Afghanistan mission. This reflects well the escalating war. But more troubling was O'Connor's astonishing revelation that "Afghanistan and these types of engagements are the future for 10, 15 years... And we have to be prepared when governments - our government and future governments - commit soldiers to offshore activities." Such are the burdens of Canadian imperialism and support for the ends of the American empire.

The opposition to the Afghan war has been most disappointing. While public sentiment is divided over the mission, organized social forces have been weak and hardly visible. After initial support to the Canadian mission, the NDP began to call for a withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan over the course of the year. But they have avoided campaigning on the issue, and they have waffled in public opposition to the war as they have searched for compromises with the Harper Government on other issues in an effort to avoid an election. For even their mild opposition to the war, they have been strenuously rebuked not only by the Conservatives, but also the Liberals. Indeed, in January newly crowned Liberal leader Stephane Dion did his best Richard Nixon impression stating that Canada would pull its troops from Afghanistan "with dishonour" if the NDP was followed.

In terms of extra-parliamentary forces, the Canadian Labour Congress and other union forces have passed good resolutions in opposition to the war, but this all. They have done next to nothing to educate members on the war, or mobilize for public demonstrations. This is in sharp contrast to the linkages between the peace and union movements in the past. The peace movement has hardly been more successful, and seems in complete disarray at the central level of the Canadian Peace Alliance in terms of strategy and agendas for building the movement. The anti-war demonstrations have been tailing off in numbers and the political slogans and focus is increasingly confused. The demonstrations have been particularly weak in Toronto and Ontario generally, where the failures to hold together a broad anti-war peace movement of unionists, students, churches and nationalist groups have been especially evident.

There is no doubt that things have gone from bad to worse. As the war in Afghanistan intensifies, hundreds of innocent Afghan citizens will continue to be killed and the bankruptcy of the puppet Karzai government in Kabul will become ever more exposed. Canada's soldiers will continue to pay the ultimate price so that the ruling classes of the Great White North can prove their fealty to the American empire. **R**

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Development After Globalization

Reviewed by Christopher Gore

*Development After Globalization:
Theory and Practice for the Embattled
South in a New Imperial Age*

By John S. Saul
Zed Books, 2006 144 pages

One thing that distinguishes good scholars from exceptional ones is an ability to raise penetrating questions that not only force a reader to take serious pause and reflect on the rationale for complex global problems and inequities, but more importantly to raise questions that directly challenge readers to confront their own personal biases and assumptions. In his latest collection of essays, *Development After Globalization: Theory and Practice for the Embattled South in a New Imperial Age*, prolific author and scholar-activist, John S. Saul, reflects on one of the most provocative and challenging issues in development theory and practice today: is there an alternative to the dominant global capitalist economic system? While three of the six essays presented are previously published works, they are all revised and updated, and

each independently engages the reader in a host of provocative and penetrating debates and arguments for why a global alternative to capitalism is needed.

The book was commissioned by Three Essays Collective – a publisher based in the northern state of Haryana, India, which strives to publish work that familiarizes readers with current debates in a range of fields such as history, society, politics, culture, education and the media. This context is important to acknowledge as several of the essays revisit issues that have circulated in the field of 'development studies' for decades. For example, in the second essay of the book, Saul and Colin Leys (co-author for that essay) reflect on 'dependency.' For some readers, at first review this might seem like an essay that can be passed over in favour of what might seem to be other more contemporary subjects like 'Globalization, Imperialism and Development,' 'Identifying Class, Classifying Difference,' or 'The Struggle, Intellectual and Political, Continues.' However, in short time, and with characteristic flair and insight, the authors quickly remind →

readers of the origins of the notion of dependency and why it should remain prominent in contemporary analysis.

Equally, it is by discussing the rise and fall of dependency theory that Saul puts forward one of the central themes in the book. The capacity to realize an alternative to the global capitalist system is difficult to envisage in the short term, he acknowledges, and may only be possible “if there is coordinated action on the part of a wide range of countries.” Moreover, and significantly, it is often easier “to be driven back to a reformist position, hoping at best to shift the existing arrangements and rules marginally in favour of the countries of the South, to give them some room for manoeuvre within the existing global capitalist system.” “In short” Saul writes, “...analysts seem to be saying, global capitalism doesn’t work for the poorest of the poor, but unfortunately, there seems to be little or not alternative to it, with, at best, only modest reform even half-way conceivable. In fact, without quite saying so, [many] are asking us to face a hard reality: the extreme difficulty of identifying a viable global Left with a viable global policy to counter capitalism and of establishing a global alternative with real growth potential and far more egalitarian practice to it.”

While in these introductory remarks Saul goes on to make clear that the essays in the book do not provide a recipe for a global alternative, “They do, however, take the present inequalities within the world-wide economy as the absolutely central fact of the current global reality and also take the central challenge that confronts humankind in the new century. Furthermore, they take as an operative premise that such inequalities will, quite simply, not be significantly ameliorated within a global system defined along capitalist lines.”

For some readers, Saul’s initial acknowledgement that the book does not contain a detailed plan of action for confronting the present economic system might seem disappointing. Moreover, those convinced that the rising tide of capitalism will eventually sweep everyone into prosperity, will easily target the absence of a formal plan as evidence that there is indeed no alternative. In either case, however, one of the central observations of the book would be missed: that one should not start looking for an alternative at the global level, but instead turn to struggles that are cast in local terms, where activists have resisted multinational corporations, “imperial states and their local intermediaries.”

It is these struggles, he suggests, that “have captured much of the radical imagination in recent years.” Moreover, in light of the recent end of the World Social Forum in Nairobi and in reference to the need for local action, Saul quotes a leading South African social activist: “It’s been good to demonstrate against world summit meetings in Seattle, Genoa, even Doha, but there are problems with following the global elite around – it’s not something poor people can afford to do... The point is, *we* have to build



where we are.” Thus, one of the central strengths of Saul’s work is not only that he analyzes and integrates an enormous range of other authors’ work in his debates, but that he equally challenges ‘urban elites,’ states, international finance institutions, and other scholars and activists (who seem to have become resigned to the fact that the present system is here to stay) to imagine a different system.

In a collection of essays written at different points of times and for different purposes, one of the natural outcomes is that the book will not flow together as well as if written at the same time or for the same purpose. Likewise, when reviewing and examining a range of literature and arguments about the pros and cons of the present global system, it is almost inevitable that readers will pine for the author to connect his arguments to specific and detailed events and examples. Given the intent of the book, this was clearly not the purpose. Also, given Saul’s continuing and past scholarship, particularly on eastern and southern Africa, there are many avenues available for exploring his perspective on country-specific contexts.

Nonetheless, owing to the force of his arguments, readers may be wishing that Saul had added an additional essay or two, which would illuminate his views in relation to detailed contemporary examples. For example, Indian readers might have gained much from Saul’s reflections on the multi-year struggle against the construction of the Sardar Sardovar Dam (part of the Narmada valley development project) but which is now complete. What of the state of Kerala’s famous embrace of socialism? Or, what about Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and his commitment to social democracy and poverty alleviation at the same time as working with business leaders and international financial agencies? What about the World Social Forum – is this an important forum to promote resistance? The intended purpose of the book was clearly not to engage such questions, however, learning how Saul sees the debate between capitalism and socialism playing out in some specific contemporary cases would have been deeply absorbing in addition to or even perhaps in lieu of presenting some of the other ideological debates he explores.

Students of development studies, and those who have slid away from some of the significant foundational debates in the field, would do well to return to this book. The book provides a sobering reminder of the complexity of the development field itself, and will remind readers about the profound and vexing questions surrounding the place and role of capitalism. In a world where extreme poverty and inequality persist, Saul’s writing reminds us that it is the difficult and uncomfortable questions about the structure of the global economy that must be confronted, as well as our individual role in perpetuating or challenging its negative outcomes. **R**

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Despite Low Vote, Québec Solidaire Registers Important Gains

Richard Fidler

The score of 3.65% will no doubt be disappointing to many Québec Solidaire (QS) members and supporters, not least because the party failed to outpoll the Greens (PVQ), who campaigned on a basically neoliberal platform but evidently capitalized on recent public concern over the environment. (The PVQ, which fielded only 37 candidates in 2003, managed to run in 108 ridings this time, although the party claims a membership of only 1,000.)

QS had hoped to break through a psychological barrier of 5% and thereby strengthen its case for representation in the National Assembly under a still-to-be-defined forthcoming electoral reform based on proportional representation.

Nevertheless, the campaign marked some major advances for the fledgling party formed just a year ago through the fusion of Option citoyenne with the Union des forces progressistes (UFP).

QS ran in all but two of Quebec's 125 ridings. More than half of its candidates (64) were women – a first for a Quebec political party. In each riding, the party had to collect at least 100 signatures of voters for its candidates to be listed on the ballot. This entailed an intensive canvassing effort, and by the end of the campaign the party membership had increased by more than 1,000 to over 6,500.

The QS score was much above its average in a number of ridings where the party waged “priority” or “intermediate” rather than “visibility” campaigns. In Montréal's Mercier and Gouin ridings, where QS co-leaders Amir Khadir and Françoise David ran, the party came second behind the PQ, with scores of over 29% and 26% respectively. In a dozen other ridings, five of them outside of Montréal, the party got more than 5% of the popular vote.

Generally, the candidates with the higher scores are well-known activists and leaders in various social movements, the women's movement and the unions.

The Montréal Central Council of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) urged its 125,000 members to vote for Québec solidaire – the first time ever that a major labour body had voted to endorse a party to the left of the PQ. Party candidates were also endorsed by a number of prominent leaders in other unions, including nurses' union leader Jenny Skene and the former president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Nicole Turmel. The Montréal wing of the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) voted to support the campaigns of QS labour activists Arthur Sandborn and André Frappier.

QS campaigned in favour of going beyond the Kyoto protocol standards and was given an “excellent” rating by Greenpeace, just behind the Greens.

During the campaign, some aboriginal leaders held a conference “on Mohawk territory” and issued a joint statement on the elections denouncing the major parties for failing to address native concerns. But Ghislain Picard, the chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, singled out Québec Solidaire as “the only exception”. QS candidate François Saillant addressed the Assembly on March 20 and got a warm reception when he explained the party's support for self-determination of the aboriginal peoples and respect for treaty and aboriginal rights.

A major issue during the election campaign was the media conglomerates' decision to exclude QS and the Greens from the party leaders' TV debate. A non-partisan petition to reverse that decision was signed by more than 25,000 persons, but the media firms, led by the federal government's Radio-Canada/CBC, refused to yield.

Although QS had few financial resources, it produced professional looking leaflets and signs. A 50-page campaign handbook was published for candidates and party workers on the party's intranet, along with informative briefing notes on key issues.

Many candidates held effective public meetings and street demonstrations in their ridings. Some held “soupes populaires,” serving hot food along with election handbills to frigid passersby. In some ridings, candidates held local assemblies inviting input from citizens on themes and demands to include in their campaigns. Some campaign meetings attracted hundreds of enthusiastic participants; one in Montréal drew more than 700 according to media reports. QS candidates spoke at many all-candidates meetings in their ridings.

Although shut out from the leaders' debate, the QS campaign did get some coverage in the mass media, including some editorial criticism. An article in Quebec's largest-circulation daily newspaper, *La Presse*, red-baited the party because two of its candidates are public members of the Quebec Communist party (PCQ); the PCQ is an affiliated collective within Québec solidaire.

Programmatically, the QS campaign was closely confined to the party's “25 concrete and realizable commitments” adopted at its platform convention in November 2006. Prominent campaign themes were the party's call for a \$10 minimum wage (it is currently \$7.75 an hour); construction of 4,000 new units of social housing; abolition of university fees and private schools; nationalization of wind-generated power; massive investment in public transit; and election of a constituent assembly to adopt democratically the constitution of a sovereign Quebec.

Unlike the 2003 campaign of its predecessor the UFP, the QS campaign did not mention international issues such as Canada's war in Afghanistan, although some QS candidates and supporters participated in the March 17 antiwar actions. Nor did the party express any opposition to capitalist trade and investment deals like NAFTA. The limited platform reflected a QS leadership decision made last year to confine its programmatic intervention in the election to “a limited number of proposals . . . conceived in terms of a governmental project that is immediately realizable in the present framework - that is, provincial and neoliberal.”

It is clear that the Québec Solidaire campaign was successful in raising the party's profile, increasing its membership and giving it valuable experience in electioneering. Whether it was equally successful in generating the political and programmatic impact it hoped to have among working people and students is a worthy topic for debate as QS members reflect on this experience in the coming months. **R**

Richard Fidler is an Ottawa activist.

The Orientation of Revolutionary Socialists in Québec Solidaire

David Mandel

1. THE CURRENT'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

The current's strategic objective is the democratic transformation of the economy to place it at the service of community needs instead of the pursuit of private profit. According to its (Marxist) analysis, such a social transformation requires a qualitative break with the existing state. This state has to be replaced by a truly popular democracy that encourages the participation of citizens and their control of elected officials. These transformations – one is economic, the other political – are dialectically related, one being the condition for the other.

2. THE STARTING POINT: A SOBER ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL CONJUNCTURE

It is obvious that the work of the socialist current would be different if we were in a period of rising struggles offering a more or less immediate perspective of socialist transformation. But the present period is characterized, on the one hand, by a triumphalist capitalism freed of all constraint; and, on the other, by weak popular resistance and a series of defeats.

In spite of this, the triumph of the bourgeoisie is fragile because it lacks legitimacy. It is unable to establish a new, stable class compromise. Unlike the 30-year period of post-War boom, the triumph of contemporary capitalism has been accompanied by social and political regression for the popular classes. The weakness of popular resistance is more a product of resignation and the seeming lack of alternatives, than of positive support for the system. There is a very widespread feeling, especially among young people, that there is a democratic deficit – that the popular will means nothing in our democracy.

That means that popular resignation can be overcome by victorious mobilizations, even limited ones – so long as they clearly demonstrate that the relationship of forces can be improved and that seemingly objective constraints are in fact nothing more than bourgeois interests elevated to the status of bogus economic laws by neoliberal ideology.

3. THE LURE OF ELECTORALISM

It is in this context that Québec Solidaire puts itself forward as a space for resistance. The paradox is that the party has built itself largely on the defeats of the social movements, on the experience of their inability to defend themselves against the aggression of contemporary capitalism. For example, party spokesperson Françoise David has explained that it was the failure of the World March of Women to win its demands that made her reflect upon the need for a political party.

The new awareness within a section of the social Left of the need for independent political action – independent in particular

of the PQ – is a big step forward for Quebec. But we should be wary of the fairly widespread illusion within QS that electoral success can, in isolation from extra-parliamentary struggles, fundamentally transform the relationship of forces in society. Getting good election results, electing members, or even forming a government – all this can help, but cannot qualitatively change the political situation outside a context of powerful extra-parliamentary mobilizations.

One of the tasks of the socialist current within QS is to alert members to why elections are not enough for changing society and that being a “party of the streets” means more than coming out to demonstrations with the party banner. We have to oppose the notion of a division of labour between the party and the social movements, in which the party takes care of election battles and the social movements take care of extra-parliamentary campaigns and mobilizations. The role of the party is to develop demands that can contribute to the unification of social struggles. These struggles are currently isolated from each other. The party's role is to bring a strategic vision to the social movements. Such a vision is sorely absent today, especially from the trade-union



movement. The party's role is to nurture debate within the social movements, to enrich the content of these debates, to encourage resistance and to strengthen the self-confidence of the popular classes.

To achieve all this, the party clearly has to be inside the social movements. It has to intellectually and morally support members who are active in the different social movements and build links between them. To do this, QS has to draw up a program that

puts forward a clear social vision and a realistic strategy for achieving it. This program should inspire and guide party members active in the different social movements. This is what Gramsci meant when he described the socialist party as a “collective intellectual” of the working class. It is not a matter of imposing anything on the social movements nor of “infiltrating” them. But if the party wants to help change society, it cannot limit itself to being a mere parliamentary echo chamber for the social movements. It must be a central player within these movements.

It is true that a political party cannot create an upturn in popular struggles out of nothing. But it can help. While it makes it difficult to score victories, the fact is that contemporary capitalism is perpetually on the attack; this provokes a reaction somewhere along the line.

4. CONTEMPORARY CAPITALISM AND THE LURE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Another tendency that the socialist current must fight is that of seeking to build a “true” social-democratic party in place of the PQ, which has abandoned its original reformist calling. This tendency is linked to a refusal to analyze in a sober manner the way that capitalism works today.

The main feature of Social Democracy has always been to limit its reforms to what the bourgeoisie is prepared to tolerate. Social Democracy’s worldwide abandonment of reformism over the last quarter century is a consequence of a shift within capitalism itself. Capitalism now operates within a world market with very high competitive standards; it refuses to meet unprofitable social needs. The bourgeoisie no longer wishes to tolerate social reforms. Quite the opposite: it demands social regression without limit, with each counter-reform leading to another.

This is what lies behind the transformation of social democrats into social liberals. And this is the fate of any party that claims to be progressive while refusing to take on the economic power of the bourgeoisie. This tendency can be found within QS. The main plank of the party’s economic program is its commitment to the social economy. This is a commitment that does not fundamentally alter the way the economy works; it places no limits on the power of the employer class and is therefore of little consequence from its point of view. Quite the opposite, since capitalists support the social economy in as much as it can help the state eliminate public services.

At the same time, one must also resist the temptation of ultraleftism. Such an approach argues that any reform within the framework of capitalism is a trap; the only solution therefore is to call for the total and immediate overthrow of the system. In practice, this approach dovetails with that of the social democrats since it is based on the idea that no other options exist. A party that takes such a stand relegates itself to the margins; in the present context, it will never be able to convince workers to take action.

So it is a matter of developing appropriate demands while providing answers to neoliberal objections. We have to demonstrate in a serious and convincing manner that necessary reforms are economically possible and that the main obstacle is the untrammelled power of capital and its refusal to rein in its greed. Such an approach offers greater hope of sparking a dynamic of

radicalization and popular mobilization.

In party discussions, we have to explain that “realism” is less a matter of providing budget numbers for our policy proposals than it is one of the party’s ability to confront capital on the social and political terrain.

5. INDEPENDENCE AS A CONDUIT FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The question of Quebec independence should be examined from the perspective of transforming the relationship of class forces. If it is to be seen as an objective that will mobilize people, the goal of independence cannot be separated from a project of social transformation. The overall project has to be the outcome of a full-blown exercise in participatory democracy whose objective is to mobilize the popular classes in favour of demands that correspond to their needs and give them the confidence to contemplate a break not only with the federal state but also with the bourgeoisie.

This was the orientation outlined in the proposal for a constituent assembly put forward by the party’s working group on independence. Unfortunately, this approach was watered down in the draft platform that was finally presented to members.

6. THE WIDEST POSSIBLE INTERNAL DEMOCRACY

The socialist current actively contributed to the establishment of Québec Solidaire. The party gives the socialist current an opportunity to come out from the margins and cease its navel-gazing. We can now engage in a broad dialogue with all progressive forces who see the need for political work that is independent of the bourgeois parties.

While social-democratic and electoralist tendencies are very present in the party, its political profile and internal party functioning have not yet been carved in stone. There is no “parliamentary party” (caucus in the Quebec National Assembly) and there is no core of recognized leaders that can prevail over the party membership. A significant share of party members have no crystallized ideological positions. For all these reasons, the socialist current can have real influence, if it is able to organize itself, widen debates, provide education, develop its press, and, most importantly, develop persuasive positions.

It therefore goes without saying that the socialist Left has to fight for the widest possible democracy within the party, for the creation of a variety of spaces where members can be autonomously active and organized, and for measures that strengthen the ability of members to have control over the party’s elected representatives.

This is a big challenge, but it has to be taken up because there are no other credible paths. What direction the party takes ultimately depends on what happens in the broader society. If there isn’t an upturn in struggles, the risk of the party’s social-democratization is very high. But the question should be approached dialectically: even while reflecting the relationship of forces within society, QS can also be an instrument for changing the relationship of forces. **R**

David Mandel is a Montreal activist who teaches political science

Sovereignists Open Debate on Quebec's Post-election Prospects

Richard Fidler

Quebec has entered a new period of political instability in the wake of the March 26 general election. For decades, the province's politics have been polarized between the federalist Liberals (PLQ) and the sovereigntist Parti Québécois (PQ). Now the sudden ascension of a relatively new right-wing "autonomist" party, the Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ), has reduced the governing Liberals to minority status in the National Assembly. The PQ, which entered the campaign with polls giving it a credible chance to regain power, is now the third party. The PQ's share of the popular vote is its lowest since the early 1970s.

Elections in capitalist democracies reflect the underlying trends within society with all the accuracy of a fun-house mirror, especially in an undemocratic first-past-the-post system like Quebec's. All the more so in a period when the nationalist and labour mobilizations that have periodically shaken Quebec since the Sixties are in ebb. What if anything do these elections tell us about the evolution of Quebec society, and the state of the sovereigntist movement?

THE END OF "SEPARATISM"?

The parliamentary geometry is clear. The makeup of the National Assembly has shifted further to the right. There are now two federalist parties for voters to choose between. As Canadian Prime Minister Harper was quick to note, the results likely rule out the prospects for a new referendum on Quebec sovereignty in the near future.

But PQ losses do not necessarily translate into gains for the federalists. The ADQ is nationalist albeit not pro-independence. Its federalism is conditional. The ADQ was allied with the PQ on the yes side in the 1995 referendum. It arose out of the split in the Quebec Liberals in the early 1990s when ADQ leader Mario Dumont (then the PLQ youth leader) joined with senior party members led by Jean Allaire in support of a proposal to give Quebec exclusive jurisdiction over 22 areas of government policy, taking over many areas now assigned to the federal government under the existing Constitution.

The ADQ platform in this election highlighted its proposal for "Quebec affirmation without separating," calling for "reopening of constitutional dialogue with the federal government and the other provinces," the adoption of a distinct "Quebec Constitution" and Quebec citizenship, designation of Quebec as the "Autonomous State of Quebec", defence of "our areas of jurisdiction" and strengthening Quebec's "financial autonomy." Quebecers must overcome their "minority complex," the party said.

The legislative agenda of Charest's Liberals is now depen-

dent on the votes of either the autonomist ADQ or the sovereigntist PQ. And ADQ leader Dumont has expressed the hope "that we could rally some kind of unanimity at the National Assembly around an autonomist vision."

Harper sought to shore up the Quebec Liberals and defuse demands for constitutional change through shoveling money to Quebec in the federal budget just a week before the election – "the mother of all sponsorship campaigns," wrote one wag. But will tactics like this satisfy those favouring more substantial changes in Quebec's relationship to Canada? They are a majority in Quebec. During the election campaign, polls registered popular support for sovereignty at well over 40% with or without a formal association with Canada. Evidently, the ADQ tapped into some of that sentiment.

The fact is that the ADQ proposals, whatever their specifics (and they are vague) are likely non-starters in the rest of Canada. It is one thing to pay lip service to recognition of Quebec, or the Québécois, as a "nation" as the federal Parliament did in November. It is quite another thing to give that notion some substance through real constitutional reform. Any serious proposals to alter the framework of federalism will most probably encounter a cold reception from the Canadian political establishment, including the NDP leadership.

The likely prospect, then, is for renewed confrontations with Ottawa in Quebec's ongoing quest for national affirmation and self-determination.

LABOUR, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN RETREAT

With three more-or-less neoliberal parties dominating politics and media attention, there is a danger that too much will be read into the shifts in voter preference, especially when the re-allocation of parliamentary seats exaggerates the actual change in the popular vote.

The ADQ's gains were largely at the expense of the Liberals. The ADQ platform sounded most of the social themes so dear to right-wing ideologues: family allowances in place of state-subsidized childcare, school autonomy and job-oriented curricula, an increased role for private healthcare, tougher law and order, lower taxes, etc. But in most respects, this program does not differ qualitatively from Charest's agenda. Québec Solidaire leaders Françoise David and Amir Khadir were probably correct to state, in a post-election news release, that the PLQ and ADQ "will be as thick as thieves when it comes to privatizing health care, increasing student fees, refusing to index social assistance and imposing [worse] working conditions on public sector workers."

In fact, public disaffection with the Liberals was generally attributed to precisely this policy direction, which the Charest government had been pursuing since its election in 2003 in defiance of mass opposition.

In their first year in office, the Liberals unveiled legislation dismantling healthcare unions, restricting and even denying bargaining rights to many public sector workers, increasing contracting out to non-union employers and removing minimum wage standards in some industries. This legislation was rammed through the National Assembly in the face of massive protests by workers throughout Quebec – the largest union mobilizations since the general strike that swept the province in 1972.

On May Day, 2004, 100,000 workers marched in Montréal, many of them demanding a general strike to defeat the government offensive. The union leaderships worked to cool the growing confrontation, however, frustrating and ultimately demoralizing many militants.

In December 2005, faced with escalating strikes and rallies by a union common front of half a million public sector workers who had been without a contract since June 2003, the Charest government successfully imposed a take-back contract to run to 2010, with stiff fines for any further strike action. These and other anti-labor moves were accompanied during Charest's term in office by substantial cuts in childcare funding, higher fees for publicly funded daycare and threats to remove a freeze on post-secondary tuition fees. In 2005, students struck colleges and universities and marched in tens of thousands in the largest such actions in Quebec history.

However, these powerful mobilizations by workers, students and others were unable to defeat the Liberals' assault, although they did force some retreats on the government. A major obstacle facing the government's opponents was their lack of a political alternative. The Parti Québécois offered at best tepid opposition to Charest's agenda and the new PQ leader André Boisclair refused to commit to re-opening public sector contracts or repealing much of the Liberals' anti-union legislation. The last year saw a sharp decline in mass actions while PQ support slowly declined in opinion polls.

With no major party presenting any perspective for reversing these setbacks, Quebec's political discourse became increasingly dominated by symbolic issues that fed on insecurities over national self-definition and identity. The ADQ proved particularly adept at exploiting this trend.

ADQ WORKS THE "IDENTITY" THEME

Until recently, the ADQ's electoral base was in Quebec's largely rural hinterland. But its support increased dramatically when ADQ leader Mario Dumont began attacking policies to accommodate the right of religious minorities, mainly Muslims, to express or practice their faith in public (for example, dress codes allowing hijabs or kirpans in the public schools, or the provision of prayer space for Muslims in unoccupied classrooms). Most of the incidents around which these issues arose have occurred in Montréal, but the ADQ's reactionary claim that "reasonable accommodation" of such practices challenged Québécois identity seemed to have its greatest resonance outside the metropolis. The ADQ appears to have tapped into some deep-seated discomfort among many Québécois, to whom cosmopolitan, multiracial and socially tolerant Montréal seems alien to their perception of Quebec culture and sense of personal security.

The ADQ's opposition to religious minority practices meant that it campaigned in favour of "secularism" – in sharp contrast to the staunchly Catholic right-wing forces of the past such as Maurice Duplessis' Union Nationale or Réal Caouette's Crédiistes. This opened the way to support from urbanites for whom religion plays little or no role in their sense of national identity.

Although the ADQ exploited these largely symbolic issues to its advantage, all parties have in fact played on fears of minority contamination of Quebec values. One of the first manifestations of such concerns came in the form of a joint Liberal-PQ motion, adopted unanimously in the National Assembly in 2005, condemning a proposal (in Ontario!) to extend legal recognition of private arbitration of family law disputes to Moslems - even though Quebec's Civil Code already bars such private arbitration. And during this election campaign it was PQ leader André Boisclair who insisted that women with burkas would have to unveil in order to vote! →

Quebec general election results, 2007

Party*	Seats			Popular vote		
	2003	2007	Change	#	%	Change
Quebec Liberal Party (PLQ)	76	48	-28	1,313,780	33.08	-12.91%
Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ)	4	41	+37	1,223,477	30.80	+12.63%
Parti québécois (PQ)	45	36	-9	1,125,078	28.33	-4.91%
Green Party of Quebec (PVQ)	-	-	-	154,367	3.89	+3.45%
Québec solidaire (QS)	-	-	-	145,051	3.65	+2.59% ‡

Adapted from Wikipedia

* Marginal parties and independent candidates omitted.

‡ Results for Québec solidaire are compared to the 2003 results for the Union des forces progressistes.



HAS PQ FORGOTTEN ITS RAISON D'ETRE?

Issues of national identity have featured prominently in post-election commentary by sovereigntists assessing the PQ's electoral debacle. The party's left-wing "club" of trade-unionists and progressives, SPQ-Libre, attributed the cultural insecurity it sees in Quebec primarily to capitalist globalization and its devastating impact on the province's regional economy and social structure. It said the PQ's response to ADQ's "identity" campaign should have emphasized "the defence and promotion of the French language and culture," issues "at the heart of the Quebec national movement."

Others echoed this theme. Jean Dorion, president of the nationalist Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society, says the PQ is the party that talked least about language during the campaign. When in government, it failed to implement legislation adopted in 2003 that proclaimed French the sole language of government communications.

"Dumont roused consciousness of identity in a very unhealthy way," says Dorion. This distracted people from some really important questions "such as the bilingualism in our society and the hegemony of English". He cites the fact that half the new megahospital infrastructures being built in Montréal will be administered in English.

Pierre Renaud, a former leader of the RIN, the PQ's independentist predecessor, argues that the PQ has focused too exclusively on its promised referendum on sovereignty. "Instead, we have to talk to them about the reasons for achieving independence. It was never for reasons of money, but we kept talking about how profitable it would be. That was a mistake. We want to form a country for issues of culture, language, pride, identity, history, etc."

Former PQ minister Yves Duhaime agrees. "We just talked about the referendum, we didn't talk about sovereignty.... Yes, we have to put the figures on the table, but achieving sovereignty is not an accounting exercise, especially when Mr. Charest himself said Quebec had the means to do it."

Historian Éric Bédard, who headed the PQ youth organization at the time of the 1995 referendum, says Boisclair left the issue of Quebec identity to the ADQ. He draws an interesting historical parallel: in 1969, the Union Nationale lost the election after it had enacted "free choice" of language in education (Bill 63). Similarly, he says, the PQ's pro-sovereignty views have become "denationalized."

FRENCH LANGUAGE STILL UNDER PRESSURE

In fact, the question of French language rights continues to be front and centre in the consciousness of many Quebec working people. Just days after the March 26 general election, the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) held a major symposium on Quebec's stalled language law reforms and the ongoing problem of anglicization of business and industry in the province. The FTQ released studies showing that about one out of every two Francophones working in both languages in the private sector must communicate primarily in English with Anglophone superiors, colleagues and subordinates.

Former PQ cabinet minister Louise Beaudoin, a featured speaker, said it was unacceptable that 30 years after the enactment of Law 101, the Charter of the French Language, language transfers in Quebec were still predominantly toward English; given

the option, immigrants, Anglophones and even some Francophones tend to choose English instead of French as their language of choice. A major problem, she said, is that “there is still no real francization program in firms with fewer than 50 employees,” where most immigrant workers are concentrated.

And Beaudoin was scathing in her criticism of PQ leader André Boisclair for not raising the issue of language and culture in the election campaign. “How is it,” she asked, “that in a two-hour debate of the party leaders, in which all the major issues in Quebec society should be aired, not a word was said about the French language and Quebec culture?”

The FTQ had motivated its endorsement of the PQ in the election on the basis of the party’s formal commitment, in its published platform, to “promoting identity, language and culture”, promoting the right to “work in French” and “achieving the sovereignty of Quebec”. At the same time, the FTQ criticized the party’s demand for a new referendum on sovereignty and Boisclair’s recent call to end the “copinage” (cronyism) between the PQ and the unions.

A NEW SOVEREIGNTIST COALITION?

Interviewed by *Le Devoir* on his reaction to the election results, Gérald Larose, a former leader of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) and now chair of the Conseil de la souveraineté, the umbrella council of pro-sovereignty organizations, noted that the PQ could no longer be said to monopolize the sovereignty movement. He called for creating a “new sovereigntist coalition,” much broader than the PQ and its supporters.

But to be successful, many argue, Quebec sovereignty must be linked to a progressive “projet de société,” a social agenda that holds out the promise and hope of a “new and different Quebec” that can do away with social inequality and poverty. The PQ’s inability to promise that social change, starkly evident after its record in government, means that it cannot provide adequate leadership for this projected coalition.

The nationalist movement is continuing to suffer the effects of its political hegemony by the PQ, which held office for 18 years between 1976 and 2003, many of them years of neoliberal austerity, “zero deficits” and cutbacks in social programs. Part of the legacy as well are the two failed referendums on sovereignty-association (1980 and 1995), the 1982 unilateral federal patriation of the Constitution, etc., the defeat of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown rounds of constitutional negotiation and reform, etc.

Offsetting these setbacks, of course, were the major reforms enacted by both PQ and Liberal governments since 1960 under the pressure of powerful and sustained labour and nationalist struggles over several decades. These reforms greatly enhanced the status of the French language and of Francophones in Quebec, modernized its education system and established social wel-

fare programs that to some degree reduced economic and social disparities with the rest of Canada including Ontario, the province with a comparable industrial development. Quebec’s relative success in these areas may have undermined to some degree the sense of urgency behind the sovereigntist movement.

INCREASING CLASS STRATIFICATION

These reforms have also increased the stratification of Quebec society, with the growth in recent decades of many middle layers of relatively well-off Francophone professionals and highly educated workers. The much-vaunted “Quebec model” of the welfare state is less appealing to them now; many are attracted by the lure of neoliberal individualism. The ADQ’s electoral inroads in urban and especially suburban areas of Quebec may reflect these sociological changes.

Issues of language and culture are still important to these layers, but they are less inclined to see solutions to their insecurities in meta changes, including constitutional reforms. However, they may want more than what Charest’s milquetoast brand of pragmatic cooperative federalism was able to yield (which was not much). In any event, nationalist consciousness has not been immune to the overall context of defeats and relative demobilization of the unions and social movements. In a political landscape dominated by neoliberal parties, allegiances were easily shifted among three parties distinguished by little more than their respective positions on the national question.

For almost five decades, class politics in Quebec have unfolded in a predominantly nationalist framework in which the contending social forces have operated within a broad consensus on the need to promote French-language rights and Francophone identity whether within or without the Confederation. That consensus remains, but new issues of identity, arising mainly around the challenges of integrating immigrants and non-Francophones within Quebec society, intersect with initial signs of a growing class differentiation within the broad nationalist movement. The PQ’s rightward shift has opened space to the left for sections of the workers and social movements to begin to break from bourgeois nationalism. The formation of Québec Solidaire reflects this, although still incompletely and not altogether coherently.

Likewise, the open rifts within the PQ will favour a renewed debate in Quebec over the road ahead for the social movements, including the trade unions whose members have long been the bedrock of support for that party.

This, and not the overnight ascension of the ADQ, may well turn out to be the most important result of the 2007 election. Historically, national and class mobilizations in Quebec, while not in lockstep, have tracked each other closely. New battles lie ahead, opening new prospects for beginning to build a broad working-class political alternative to capitalist exploitation and national oppression. **R**

Richard Fidler is an Ottawa activist.

NO ONE IS ILLEGAL



**NATIONAL DAY
OF ACTION
FOR
STATUS FOR ALL**



MAY 5th

SATURDAY 12:00 PM

**Christie Pits Park
(Bloor & Christie, Toronto)
nooneisillegal@riseup.net**

**Jean Talon & Châteaubriand
(Jean-Talon metro, Montréal)
sansfrontieres@resist.ca**

**Last Year Millions Of People Across North America Marched
For Status For All! On May 5th 2007, Become Part Of A Growing
Movement Rooted In The Struggle Of Migrants Everywhere!**