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A SOCIALIST PROJECT REVIEW



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About Relay

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

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About the Socialist Project

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

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The Vital Struggle Against Ontario's Sub-Poverty Welfare System

John Clarke

A drastic reduction in the adequacy of income support payments is key to the neoliberal agenda. This is especially true in a country like Canada that had earlier seen the consolidation of a basic social infrastructure. However much the balance is tilted in favour of the employers, employment insurance (EI) and welfare payments limit the desperation of the unemployed and the degree to which those with jobs can be forced to make concessions. Massive reductions in federal EI and provincial social assistance rates have been a focus of governments in the last fifteen years and the Mike Harris 'Common Sense Revolution' in Ontario was a very big part of this process.

The dramatic and confrontational Harris years have given way to a more sedate pace of social retrogression under the direction of the McGuinty Government. Nonetheless, once inflation is taken into account, 760,000 people on social assistance in Ontario will be poorer when McGuinty goes to the polls than they were when he began to implement his rather dubious agenda of 'change' in this province. At least a 40% reduction in the spending power of welfare cheques has taken place since 1995. Harris's work has not been reversed under the Liberals. It has really only been consolidated.

The demand to 'Raise the Rates' by 40% has been a major focus of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty's (OCAP) activities since McGuinty took power. We have challenged the Liberals on their broken promises and duplicity. It has, however, been a

very difficult period by virtue of a very serious demobilization of social resistance. We have not seen major protests or campaigns to place demands before the regime in Queen's Park. The myth of a kinder and gentler Liberal Ontario has been able to take hold in this situation. Until recently, a major political mobilization around Provincial anti-poverty demands seemed beyond our grasp. A broad-based coalition of union and community organizations, under the name of 'Toronto Anti Poverty' is now planning a September march on the Ontario legislature. Several initiatives underlie this development.

After a couple of years of raising the demand for a major welfare increase from the Liberals, OCAP came across a provision within the rules of the system known as the Special Diet Policy. This allowed for a monthly payment of up to \$250 a month per person on assistance, if a qualified medical provider diagnosed the need. One of the most important fights we've ever taken up came out of this. We reasoned that this obscure provision was never intended to be widely known and that, even where people on assistance applied for it, would in most cases be denied by the bureaucracy of the system. However, we asked ourselves what would happen if we could organize to ensure that thousands could obtain access to medical providers ready to fill in their applications for the Supplement. Moreover, we posed the question of how the matter would be affected if this mass of applicants had serious levels of support to ensure they could not be turned away empty handed when they put in their forms.

Throughout 2005, a Special Diet Campaign unfolded that provided concrete answers to these questions. Over 8,000 people passed through community clinics in Toronto that OCAP initiated and these spread to other Ontario towns. While the direct results of our efforts were significant, of much greater importance was the degree to which an awareness of the Special Diet spread spontaneously through poor communities. In that year, spending on the Supplement by Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support offices in this Province went up by \$40 million.

The campaign, however, went beyond an effort to put more money into peoples' pockets by utilizing a provision within the rules of the system. We very much presented this as a tactic that had to be linked to the bigger and more important issue of a major general increase in welfare income. This mix of a short term effective tactic and a broader goal tended to give a political focus to the campaign that captured imaginations and won support. Medical providers working at the community clinics organized themselves into a 'Health Providers Against Poverty' organization. A wide range of social agencies helped with clinics and spoke out to defend the right of their clients to access the Supplement. Many low-income communities, especially immigrant communities, used their informal internal communication networks to ensure that access to the Special Diet was obtained. Within the Somali community this assumed such a significant scale that a new organization, 'OCAP Women of Etobicoke' was formed.

The very nature of opposition to our efforts by those in authority tended to increase the support and mobilization on the

issue. Despite its supposedly 'progressive' Council majority, the City of Toronto did all it could to block access to the Special Diet. Welfare offices turned away hundreds of applicants, often in violation of their own rules. City politicians acted to limit these abuses only with the greatest reluctance and under considerable pressure. However, the huge numbers of people coming to Special Diet clinics had to back up their applications by joining in actions at local welfare offices or at City Hall to ensure they actually got what they were entitled to. This increased the level of organizing and could not fail to bring home to people that the process of applying for a dietary supplement, while necessary, posed the question of why a living income was not generally available?

The provincial government realized very well that greatly increased access to the Special Diet was beginning to call into question their role of quietly consolidating the social cut-backs of the Harris Tories. They acted in November of 2005 to revise the application form for the benefit in ways that would make it much harder to access. In fact, this measure by no means solved their problems. Lots of people did get cut off the Supplement but applications increased to a degree that was astounding. Moreover, after a year of working with the new rules, Health Providers Against Poverty felt able to resume the community clinics and reopen a channel for hundreds of people.

The ongoing agitation around the Special Diet, has meant that the issue of welfare rates has been kept alive. At the same time, agitation on the stagnant minimum wage has also been very significant in building a clamour on poverty issues. The well known efforts of NDP MPP Cheri Di Novo and her Federal counterpart, Peggy Nash, to put the issue of the minimum wage on the legislative agenda gained a very large amount of support and attention. Labour movement campaigns on the issue also put pressure on the Liberal government. OCAP is very critical of the degree to which electoral calculations and notions of political respectability led to these efforts focusing only on minimum wage levels and ignoring questions of social assistance income. However, that they contributed to a general sense that poverty had to be acted on is beyond dispute.

We should also acknowledge that the inaction of the McGuinty regime on poverty also revealed some disagreements at the top in society. The capitalist class is not a monolith and it has a (relatively) left wing along with its right wing. There are those in their ranks who question how far the process of impoverishment should go and can go before it creates adverse consequences and becomes self-defeating. So, we have TD Bank economists arguing for a higher minimum wage and increased social spending and we have the high profile *Toronto Star* 'War on Poverty.' Such divisions within the economically and politically powerful are important and provide an opening for a move to win concessions by those directly affected by the poverty they debate.

So it is that, for the first time in many years, a significant grouping of forces appears to be coming together to

forge a common front challenge to poverty. Following a call issued by activists from the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC), a working committee of union activists, social agency representatives and community organizers is now planning for a September rally at the Ontario legislature. Demands will focus on social assistance rates, the minimum wage and housing. Added to this is support for the 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' demand of No One is Illegal. In this city, a demand that those without immigration status be able to obtain basic services without being handed over to immigration authorities is a key and vital anti poverty demand that we all wish to support.

Planning for the September action is in a relatively early stage at the time that this is being written but things are clear enough to sound a note of optimism. Dozens of organizations have already endorsed the event. An ambitious job of outreach in low-income communities is being set in motion. An impressive rally, that includes a series of 'feeder marches' by participating organizations, is being developed. An event like this, in the lead up to the provincial election, could have serious political impact and set the stage for more sustained and province-wide mobilizing.

The question of raising social assistance rates and turning back the tide of poverty is not some humanitarian issue. It is a vital question for the ability of the working class population as a whole in terms of defending past gains. For too long, the issue has been treated as a low priority 'good cause.' It's time to change that and build a movement that can place demands before governments that can't be brushed aside. **R**

John Clarke is a longtime activist with [OCAP](#).





Dana Brown

“Atlantica” is essentially a proposed hyper free trade zone between the Atlantic provinces and the North Eastern United States. Atlantica is a wish list for the neoliberal business elite who want policy harmonization between the Maine-New Brunswick border. This neoliberal agenda has potential serious consequences for certain policy areas, like labour laws, environmental laws, and various social programs. The Atlantica agenda is a threat to Canada’s sovereignty and the integrity of its democratic institutions. It is not just a wet-dream for frazzled economists and ultra right-wing business leaders, the rhetoric has been taken up by New Brunswick’s Premier who harps the benefits of the Atlantic Gateway, which is essentially Atlantica watered down to a more tactful and voter friendly language.

The issues of Atlantica necessarily invoke other broader issues and themes in Canada’s history. For instance, economic integration, or ‘deep integration’ as it is known today, neoliberalism, and the North American Free Trade Agreement are all pertinent themes that underpin the Atlantica initiative. Atlantica needs to be placed in its ideological and historical context in order that its likely outcome can be determined.

Economic integration between Canada and the United States has been an issue for Canada since before confederation. The proponents of a British North American Union were driven by a potentially hostile and victorious American army to the south. Americans had rejected reciprocity and instead turned inward to lick their civil war inflicted wounds. The Fathers of Confederation had no choice but to create a union of their own. Britain’s wavering defence commitment to British North America, and a potentially hostile and expansionist U.S., as well as the threat of economic stagnation, prompted British colonies in the north to turn to cooperation amongst themselves. The result was a British North American Union known as Canada; a distinct nation that grew up living in the shadow of a giant.

Whether relations were hostile or warm, economic dominance of the U.S. over Canada has been a long-standing theme in Canada’s national history. The end of the Second World War signified

a dramatic shift in Canada’s foreign political and economic relations. The post Second World War partnership with the U.S. signified a new age in which Canada’s economy became highly integrated with the USA. The North American Free Trade Agreement and the Atlantica proposal are outcomes of this partnership.

If Atlantic Canadians and people from Maine or New Hampshire have at least heard of Atlantica, they are most likely only aware of it on a superficial level, and it’s no fault of their own. There is a low level of information in dominant media (newsprint, television, and magazine publications), which leads to the alienation of citizens in policy decision-making, and the corporate media’s prolific dominance and bias. For instance the *Telegraph Journal* has recently published an article that featured the president of the Atlantic Provinces Chambers of Commerce (APCC) stating, “They think we’re funded by big business. I wish we were. It just doesn’t work like that. There are no deep pockets behind us, we have to scrimp and beg for every dollar we get.” With false and misleading statements like this, coming from a journalist who doesn’t seem to understand the principle of objectivity, it’s no wonder a lot of people don’t have the information they need to make a decision about Atlantica. It is the corporate-owned press in New Brunswick that is parroting the talking points of the APCC and big business interests, who are the real pushers of Atlantica. The media simply has not been reporting in depth on the proposed policies of Atlantica, and unfortunately, many working Canadians and Americans do not know what economic and political elites are planning for them behind closed doors.

The Atlantica initiative envisions a cross-border economic region consisting of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Eastern Quebec, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and northern New York State. Atlantica, also known as the Atlantic International Northeast Economic Region (AINER) has been making media headlines in Atlantic Canada for the past year, culminating in a large conference in Saint John, New Brunswick entitled: *Reaching ‘Atlantica’: Business without Borders*, from June 8th – June 10th. The Atlantica concept comes from the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS), which is a

corporate funded neo-conservative think tank based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The main public proponents of Atlantica include Brian Lee Crowley, president of AIMS, Jim Quigley, president of the Atlantic Provinces Chambers of Commerce (APCC), and the Bank of Montreal, as well as a slew of big businesses based in Atlantic Canada and the north eastern United States (Irving Oil, Baxter Foods, Imperial Oil, Royal Bank of Canada, Bank of Nova Scotia, Toronto Dominion Bank, McCain Foods, Nova Scotia Power, Kimberly-Clark and Southam Inc., Bank of Montreal, Air Canada, Exxon Mobil, etc.)

The Atlantica concept envisions a union of northeastern U.S. and eastern Canada in which trade, energy, environment, labour, and social policy legislation would be harmonized. Gary Leech, a political scientist from Cape Breton University, sums up the Atlantica initiative, “the objective is to move beyond NAFTA to an intensification of free trade on the regional level by encouraging provincial and state governments in Atlantic Canada and the northeastern United States to apply similar economic and social policies, including regulations that govern labour and the environment.” Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians characterizes Atlantica as “free trade on steroids,” and a secretive and undemocratic agenda to lower labour standards of Atlantic Canadians while generating mega profits for large companies.

Proponents of Atlantica argue that this area of North America shares common demographics, social-political and cultural values, as well as common economic interests. Because of these “common interests,” proponents argue that the Atlantic region could experience unprecedented economic prosperity, if only trade and policy would divert itself from traditional east-west political-economic ties that came with confederation in 1867.

Atlantica proponents state that Canada’s eastern provinces are strategically located in order to intercept three international trade blocs, NAFTA, EU-NAFTA, and the Suez Express from Asia. Proponents argue that in order for this to happen, new infrastructure has to be built, (roads, shipping, air routes, and railways) that would facilitate businesses in bringing goods to and from north-eastern markets. The Panama Canal is said to be too shallow in order to facilitate the new generation of cargo container ships. Subsequently, the Halifax port has the potential to receive more trade from Asian countries, especially China, since this port has naturally deep waters.

A part of the Atlantica initiative is already being implemented. Saint John is being retooled and retrofitted into being an ‘energy

hub’ that will export cheap and easy energy to domestic markets in the USA. The United States needs a cheap supply of energy for domestic use in order to free up more oil for military ventures abroad. This aspect of the project is well underway in New Brunswick, as the newly elected Liberal government is going ahead with the refurbishing of Point Lepreau nuclear power station. The New Brunswick government is also interested in building a second nuclear power station. Irving Oil is developing plans to implement a second oil refinery facility in Saint John (the existing Irving oil refinery is currently the largest oil refinery in North America) while a Liquified Natural Gas Pipeline is scheduled, although hotly debated by civic opposition groups, to go through Saint John and into U.S. markets.

Added-value processing of our natural resources, which could deliver high quality and long term employment, is being overlooked by companies that refuse to invest in our provinces. The energy needs of our province are being overlooked in favour of big business need for mega profits. The only promise of prosperity comes from temporary construction jobs. It is the people of New Brunswick that will have to bear all of the environmental and health risks associated with pipelines, refineries and nuclear power plants. That’s just not good enough.



Nova Scotia demonstrates against Atlantica: The June 15th march in Halifax

Unfortunately, Atlantica is not an isolated concept. The Canadian government has sponsored several studies of cross border regions (CBR) along the Canada-U.S. border. The other proposed cross border regions have been identified as the pacific coast (British Columbia-Oregon border), rocky mountains (northern BC-Alaska border), great plains, (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba-Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota border) great lakes region (Ontario-Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio). It’s important to keep in mind that cross border organizations between Canada and U.S. are nothing new, as several international →

border tribunals concerning boundaries and natural resources have been established since the early 20th century. What is new is that the scope and policy relevance of these new proposed regions have increased consequences on the everyday lives of Canadian and American citizens. The basic response of the Canadian government in two recent publications on the issue is that local economic stakeholders (large private businesses) need more of a role in implementing and deciding policies that encourage supposed benefits of CBRs. In other words, the federal and provincial governments are considering letting business interests from the private sector formulate and influence key areas of public policy. Considering the rising tide of neoliberalism, an ideology hostile to the worker protections and benefits, this is a dangerous and undemocratic proposition.

This attitude of the federal government is consistent with a shift in Canada's international relations since the Second World War. The Cold War ushered in a new era of Can.-U.S. economic integration as Canada's traditional ally, Britain, had suffered a military and fiscal decline after the Second World War. The creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the bilateral North American Air Defence Agreement (NORAD), meant closer and permanent military cooperation between Canada and USA, during peacetime. Trade between the two countries also increased; especially American imports of natural resources from Canada as the U.S. required key resources in order to fuel the growing arms race with the USSR. America's new role as the world's military police meant profit and relative stability for Canadian markets. Canada shipped crucial elements for domestic and military production (zinc, nickel, aluminium, copper, and uranium). So Canada became a crucial hinterland of natural resources during the Cold War. The same is still true today in a post Cold War era, as the U.S. still needs Canada as a raw materials and energy supplier for domestic and military production. Seen through the eyes of the American economic and political elites, we are of strategic importance as an export market and source of raw materials.

On the surface, Atlantica's initiatives and developments seem like positive change for Atlantic Canadians and Americans. However, one has to look closer at the nature of the policies, their history, and ideological roots. The arguments coming from the Atlantica public relations campaign are compelling in a region that has historically experienced heavy out migration, high unemployment, and rampant deindustrialization. However, the Atlantica initiative is nothing

new; it is merely one phase in a long line of neoliberal policies that have been gaining prominence since the 1970s in Canada and the United States.

In order to assess the probable outcomes of a hyper free trade zone, one needs to look at historical precedent as a reasonable predictor. The North American Free Trade Agreement's outcome should give Canadians an idea of what advantages, if any, Atlantica would bring to Atlantic Canadians.

Free trade between Canada and the United States is a recurring theme in Canada's political history, but the 1988 trade agreement struck by then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was unprecedented in that it had undone and reversed a long standing tariff wall and protectionist policies, more or less, held up by Canada since 1879.

In 1878, John A. Macdonald's Conservatives campaigned on the platform of the National Policy, beating the Liberals who advocated for free trade with the USA. The National Policy was the basic economic policy line for Canada since 1879. The policy was designed to encourage and develop Canadian manufacturing and for American companies to jump the tariff wall and set up branch plants. The Liberals campaigned for free trade with the US again in 1911, but lost, partly because the Conservatives were able to exploit Canadians' intense anti-Americanism.

The 1911 election on free trade was also significant from the American aspect; particularly because historical research shows that for the first time, American political-economic policy towards Canada was significantly coherent. For Americans, the aim and main thrust of the proposed free trade deal was to gain ready ac-



Clockwise from upper left: in front of Peter McKay's office in Antigonish; black block contingent before the Halifax march; scrum with police in the 'red zone' (21 arrests); the march begins

cess of Canadian natural resources, integrate Canada with the American economy, and wean Canada away from its historic ties with the British Empire. As then President Taft wrote to Theodore Roosevelt, "It [the free trade deal] would make Canada into only an adjunct of the United States."

Like 1911, the main election issue in 1988 was free trade with the USA. The U.S. congress had already passed the free trade deal with marginal dissent the same year and now it was up to Prime Minister Mulroney to convince Canadians that free trade was the way to go. During the 1988 election, it appeared that incumbent Mulroney was going to lose to his main opponent, Liberal Party leader John Turner. However, as historian Robert Bothwell explained, the Canadian business community panicked, and began flooding the electorate with all kinds of fear mongering propaganda. "The Canadian dollar trembled: if Mulroney were defeated, it would collapse to the level of the peso." Probably out of a combination of fear and ignorance, Canadians re-elected Mulroney with a clear majority (50 % of the vote) in order that he would pass the free trade deal in Parliament. On New Year's Day Mulroney and Reagan declared Free Trade between Canada and the USA. The first few percentage points in Canada's tariff schedule were reduced the same day.

The question remains, what are the effects of the Free Trade deal? There is still a debate over whether the benefits promised of free trade ever materialized. Consistent with its neoliberal roots, NAFTA (which was an extension of the 1989 Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement) has succeeded in eroding the living standards of working Canadians. Research by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has shown that NAFTA has caused an increase in income inequality since 1995, the first since the Second World War; slowed economic growth in the last 15 years, slower than any other 15 year period since the Second World War; caused huge cuts to public spending commensurate with U.S. levels; resulted in large tax cuts for corporations, weakened labour laws, lowered levels of union density and increased concession bargaining by unions. Wages and living standards have stagnated while inflation rises, yet the wealthiest 20% in Canada continue to experience unprecedented gains. Overall, Canada experiences a large productivity gap with the U.S. and has not made a significant transition toward a knowledge-based economy. More recent data has shown that Canada is losing an alarming amount of manufacturing jobs while relying more on resource extraction (which is highly vulnerable to price fluctuations on international markets). Over the last four years, 300,000 jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector. Most of those jobs were high quality jobs that kept other businesses, like manufacturing inputs and sectors in the service industry, afloat. Manufacturing jobs are wellsprings for other jobs and when they disappear they create a domino effect of job losses.

Today there are reports that show more working Canadians are living in poverty – despite working full time, or working various part time or contract jobs – than ever. 34% of children living in poverty have at least one parent who is working full time. Research by the Canadian Association of Food Banks shows that employed people make up the second largest group of people lining up for groceries. Although these are national statistics, economic hard-

ships are always magnified on the eastern Canadian provinces.

The effects of NAFTA are evident by examining quantitative data gathered by Statistics Canada. The past 20-25 years has shown a marked decrease or continued state of lower living standards for Atlantic Canadians. Thom Workman, a political scientist from University of New Brunswick, sums up the goals of neoliberalism as a drive to exchange "fordist-type workers [unionized production workers] in the steel industry for unprotected workers in a call centre, thus swelling ranks of the working poor in Atlantic Canada." The working poor are a growing constituency in Atlantic Canada; typically these waged workers reside in the service sector and get paid, on average, a few dollars over minimum wage in each respective province. Management practices in these workplaces are heavy handed, and workers receive little or no benefits and are thus forced to pay out-of-pocket for eye care, dental care and prescription drugs. To add insult to injury, these workers are not even made to feel secure in their bad jobs. Neoliberal globalization creates a workforce that is super flexible, willing to continuously train and work evenings, weekends and holidays. In effect, more and more workers are made not to expect too much in the way of the gainful employment experienced by their parent's generation.

Also, minimum wage levels in all Atlantic provinces are, and have consistently been, the lowest in the country. In the face of growing inflation, every province's minimum wage in Atlantic Canada has fallen short of inflation by a wide margin. For example, by the year 2000, if minimum wage was tied to inflation, it would have been about \$9.00/hr. instead of \$5.65/hr. A low minimum wage also acts as a benchmark for wages across the labour market; a low minimum wage will act as a magnet that pulls all other wages down. If that isn't enough, outright levels of poverty are high, and have increased in the 1990s after the implementation of free trade. In 1998, one in five children in Atlantic Canada were living in poverty, and the situation has not improved since. For single persons living in poverty, the percentage was at 37.1% in New Brunswick, and as high as 40.7% in Newfoundland. Free trade has been particularly harsh on the living standards of working Canadians in this part of the country.

So the flimsy assumptions that our political leaders use as their basis for economic planning are either serious oversights or outright fabrications designed to generate compliance. The trickle-down theory does not appear to be working, and instead, is trickling upward to the wealthiest people. Put in this perspective then, the agenda of Atlantica can be examined in its true light: a vile attack of the living standards of Atlantic Canadians. Alarminglly the people of AIMS refer to union density, the current size of the government with respect to the private sector, public sector employment, and even the minimum wage as factors holding back prosperity! The ideas of AIMS are to race to the bottom in order to attract new investment. This would be a huge gamble for Canadians and considering the lack of gains from our already existing free trade deal with the U.S., it's definitely a bad deal for working Canadians. **R**

Dana Brown works with *Citizens' Press* in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Harper's "Action Plan" Promises no Action at All

Elaine Brownell

For many Canadians the environment has recently shifted from a concern about how our actions will affect future generations to a growing worry about a coming global catastrophe. Despite the best efforts of lobbyists and spin artists bankrolled by corporations like Exxon-Mobil, people have absorbed the message put forward by 1575 of the world's top scientists that drastic societal changes are necessary to avoid an environmental apocalypse. Predictably, the federal Conservative government is embracing this new political consciousness as an opportunity to gain support for regressive policies by labeling them 'green.' The Harper administration's "Action Plan to Reduce Greenhouse Gases and Air Pollution," released April 26, 2007, and "Clean Air Act" aim to convince voters that tough, serious measures to curb climate change can occur without major changes to their lifestyle or reduced economic growth.



The press releases and government websites emphasize terms like "regulation" and "reduction targets" on the one hand, and Kyoto-like concepts such as carbon trading on the other to attempt to underline the compatibility of capitalism and environmental sustainability. A closer examination reveals that the legislation safeguards the Harper government's decidedly un-green pet projects and interests like developing the Alberta oil sands. The administration's environmentalist policies have generally been lauded by business lobbyists and condemned by major environmentalist organizations like Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund,

the Sierra Club, and the Pembina Institute, in addition to the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. Cashing in on the public's fears and anxieties is as old as politics. The difference here is that the stakes are higher than they have ever been before. Political change will either come now, with the people seeing through the administration's manipulative tactics and demanding an environmental policy that requires a radical change in the economic and social systems, or later – after environmental catastrophe forces change.

The "Clean Air Act" and Environment Minister John Baird's "Action Plan" are examples of enabling legislation, meant as additions and revisions to already existing statutes. The "Clean Air Act," or Bill C-30, came under particular fire from opposition parties as an attempt to take the teeth out of the Kyoto accord without appearing to renege on environmental commitments. The NDP, supported by the Bloc Québécois, brought forward a motion to vote on a completely re-written version of the bill on May 17 that they argued would actually be effective at achieving the emissions reductions promised by the Conservatives. Whereas the original version of the bill put targets so far in the future that the current administration could not possibly be held accountable for whether they are achieved, the revamped version emphasizes short, medium, and long term targets and consistency with both Kyoto and scientifically recommended levels of emissions reductions.

Don't be too quick to jump on the revamped Bill C-30 bandwagon, however. Both the NDP and Conservative Party's press releases and information meant for the general public are fraught with political weasel words. The information released by the Conservatives emphasizes "targets to reduce industrial air pollution by half by 2015" – but no suggestion of how they would be enforced. There are "mandatory targets" for industrial reduction of greenhouse gas emissions – but reading further makes it clear that allowances for carbon trading and higher emissions for the oil and gas industries mean that this reduction is not likely to be significant or in absolute terms. The NDP criticizes the Conservative's proposal to consult extensively with corporate representatives before imposing emissions reduction targets, but nowhere does the NDP actually promise that such consultations would not take place under a revised act or if the NDP were to come into power.

In addition, the Bloc and NDP have both criticized the Conservatives for masking their protection of the oil and gas industry and the Alberta oil sands in particular. However, in the same breath, the NDP calls for "sustainable development" of the oil sands – as opposed to attempting to wean the economy off fossil fuels altogether. When Bush announced that "America is addicted to oil" and wanted to break its dependency on imports from the Middle East, he was serious. What he failed to mention was that he planned

on replacing it with Canadian oil. The Pembina Institute, an environmental think tank, pointed out that the oil industry in general and new oil sands facilities in particular benefit disproportionately from the loopholes in the Conservative government's proposed legislation. It is easy to see why both Harper and Bush would be interested in developing the oil sands – a new source for the world's rapidly depleting supply of oil from a stable ally with the potential for massive profits. However, this is obviously not consistent with either emissions reductions or decreased dependency on unsustainable fossil fuels.

The public's struggle to psychologically handle the information that a major environmental crisis is looming in their lifetime has massive potential for political consciousness-raising. People are beginning to realize that there is an incongruity between the scope of the problem and its proposed solutions. With every pseudo-radical proposition like the Clean Air Act or even Kyoto, politicians and business executives expose the fact that they are part of the problem, since they benefit most from maintaining the status quo. The suggestion that energy efficient light bulbs

and recycling will help save the planet is ridiculous in the face of predictions of deadly hurricanes, the flooding of coastal cities, and resource wars. The general public needs to realize that there is an inequality of blame for environmental degradation that runs parallel to the inequality of wealth on the planet. While there is a potential for a massive shift in public political consciousness, there is also tremendous potential for it to remain stagnant and placated by reassurances from the government and corporate elite that something is being done about the problem and everything will be fine. Measures that would actually regulate and sanction industrial greenhouse gas emissions would be vital and a huge step in the right direction. Ultimately, we will have to realize that capitalist growth is by definition environmentally unsustainable – either before or after we suffer the consequences. **R**

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Lost in translation?

Socialists, Elections, and the Search for Relevance

Joel Davison Harden

This article responds to David Mandel and Richard Fidler's writing on Québec Solidaire (QS) in the socialist journal *Relay*. Both raise a number of thoughtful points about this new electoral party, the first I've ever joined. In interest of keeping some focus, I'll concentrate on Mandel's ideas, which discuss the "orientation of revolutionary socialists" in QS (which are relevant to similar debates in other new Left parties).

To offer an appropriate response, however, I will need a bigger framework than the recent experience of Quebec politics. Instead, I'll discuss the experience of socialists in recent decades, and the circumstances that led to their current seat on the political margins. After doing this, I'll suggest four orientations to guide socialist participation in QS, and other emerging Left parties:

- 1) To be heard, I must speak in a language others can understand;
- 2) I don't have all the answers, and should listen to (and learn from) others;
- 3) To have credibility, I must earn respect through regular work on shared campaigns;
- 4) Socialism, particularly the 'bottom-up' variety, has enduring value, and a lot to offer today's Left political parties.

Recent History (1975-1995): Lowering the 'Red Flag'

For a very long time, perhaps longer than thirty years, socialists in English Canada and Quebec (like elsewhere) have lived on the margins of political life. Sometimes this exile was self-imposed, other times it was caused by larger forces. Whatever the case, in the two decades after 1968-1975, many hung up their red berets as other radicals took centre stage. Then began the onward march of Reagan and Thatcher's conservative revolutionaries, the forerunners of George W. Bush and Stephen Harper.

By and large, the Left's answers were 'new' social movements: feminism, environmentalism, anti-racism and movements opposed to homophobia (among other issue-based campaigns). The labour movement, the traditional base of socialists, despite periodic outbursts, was relatively quiet until the mid-90s. During these decades, those carrying the socialist torch suffered more than an identity crisis. It is more fitting to call it an inertia crisis.

In the face of a hostile political culture, and leeriness from new social movements, most socialists opted for safe, small groups of like-minded individuals. Some (like myself) went to grad school, and sought out academic insurgents. The world outside was a scary and unfamiliar place. Other socialists took a different →

path, and tried to fit into elite politics. This philosophy inspired the Socialist Party of France, who comrade Marx might have mistaken for Adam Smith's tea party. The same philosophy inspired Gilles Duceppe and Bob Rae, two former socialists turned political entrepreneurs. All of this, of course, has been very unfortunate for working people, and those who think workers can change the world.

Even if it seemed necessary, "lowering the red flag" to the "almost" or "already" converted isolated socialists. Perhaps because of their isolation, some socialists carried a 'know-it-all' arrogance into activist projects, sowing a bitterness against socialism that remains to this day. It also did not help that some repressed others in the name of socialism over the past eighty years, killing thousands (even millions) in the process. All of these things, understandably, shrank the appeal of socialism. For the most part, those intent on new forms of 'bottom-up' radicalism looked elsewhere.



A New Period of Opportunities (1995 to present)

Since the mid 1990s, however, the world has once again seen a new period of mass bottom-up movements, though not on the scale of the 1960s. As activists campaigned against war and corporate greed, the terms 'anti-capitalism' or 'anti-imperialism' gained new currency. A new process of participatory radicalism – bottom-up organizing combined with the spread of radical ideas – had begun.

In November 1999, the "Battle of Seattle" helped connect a global justice movement against corporate trade deals. On February 15, 2003, over 20 million people marched against an impending war in Iraq. Today's new Left political parties like QS have emerged in this context.

What's surprising (and perhaps telling) is the appeal of socialism didn't dramatically improve in these conditions, save for the obvious exception of Venezuela. That is not to say socialists have been inactive; far from it. Some socialists have made important contributions in the last decade. Many have played key roles in building today's mass, inclusive movements against corporate trade deals and the Bush / Cheney 'War on Terror,' even if these movements have declined somewhat in recent years.

But for the most part, socialists engaged in these movements are often simply known as good activists, which hasn't translated into growth for socialist groups. Consequently, in seeking political relevance, socialists have joined (and helped build) more diverse organizations, including today's new Left parties like QS.

Lost in Translation? Connecting with Today's New Left Parties

This has led to an odd situation. Though most working people and activists would not know it, the "existing socialist community" (for lack of a better term) in Canada and Quebec has quite a few sharp thinkers, organizers and campaigners. There are two major problems that ensure this disconnect persists.

First, when it comes to shop talk (and not movement talk), most socialists still speak in a dialect of the English language when referring to capitalism. For example, consider the following passage from Mandel's writing on QS: *"...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."*

Here, Mandel makes a crucial point, but the language is accessible to only a few. I make a similar argument with socialist friends who insist the words 'smash,' 'bolshevik' or 'workers' power' be included in all publications. To connect with others in today's new Left parties, socialist analysis cannot be introduced out of context. Instead, socialists must connect with the language and culture of today's activists. In doing so, they can convey the value of socialist ideas and, perhaps just as importantly, learn something from others in the process.

Consider this translation of Mandel's excellent advice for activists in QS: *"Some say it's impossible for activists to win things in today's political conditions. We protested, but Bush still went to war. We opposed Harper, but he still got elected. We exposed the phony trade deals, but more keep coming. All of these things are true, but only one side of the political struggle going on out*

there. Who killed the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, or the Free Trade Area of the Americas? Why isn't Canada at war in Iraq, and why do polls show most Canadians don't support our military's role in Afghanistan? Why did Iraqi and Nigerian oil workers recently win concessions from their Bush-friendly governments despite harassment and repression? These are partial victories in a larger campaign for global justice my friend, one 'bottom-up' socialists care deeply about, and we must keep fighting. With an effective campaign, what seems impossible today is possible tomorrow."

After making this important point, Mandel proceeds to another: there is a risk of losing one's radical values once you play the game of electoral politics. All too often, politics gets reduced to chasing sound bites, and being respectable for so-called 'mainstream public opinion.' Mandel calls this process the 'lure of parliamentarism.' For a more plain language explanation, I'd call it 'running to the centre' or 'abandoning the movement.' Whatever the terminology, socialists must convey this point clearly:



it's critical that new Left parties don't stray from the activist trenches, and abandon the movement in a desperate search for elite respectability.

I don't think QS has done this. In fact, the party stood alone in the last election as the one voice that offered truly progressive demands raised by today's activists: closing corporate tax havens, reducing RRSP tax exemptions (enjoyed by wealthier Quebecers), nationalizing wind power, respecting the sovereign rights of aboriginal people, more investment in health care and education, and, perhaps most importantly, proposing a bottom-up process to renew Quebec's democracy, and settle, at long last, its relationship to Canadian politics.

Of course, these demands fall short of calling for socialist revolution, but the 1,000 or so devotees of this in Quebec have yet to persuade others that it is necessary. Until that happens, the

best opportunity for socialists, as Mandel points out, is an active, bottom-up democracy in QS and other new Left parties. In my closing words, I'll add the additional necessity for socialists to roll up their sleeves, and earn respect for 'bottom-up socialism' through building shared campaigns.

Earning the Right to Criticize, Explaining the Relevance of Bottom-up Socialism

The opportunities for rebuilding bottom-up socialism today are tremendous, but it involves reaching out beyond the existing socialist Left. It involves talking to people in a language folks can identify with and understand. Even more importantly, it involves earning the right to criticize by working with others on shared campaigns.

This, to make a long story short, is what bottom-up socialists have accomplished in Venezuela. Their movement began with a liberal democratic focus, but later radicalized as activists learned lessons from successive experiences. The bottom-up socialists who've participated in this process are now among the most respected voices for the legions of Venezuela's poor. The process remains fragile, and is challenged by several contradictions, but its direction is one that should inspire the work of socialists in QS and other new Left parties.

Instead of seeking compromise with our rulers, new Left parties should act as a mirror of social movements, and reflect the image of global justice in the arenas of capitalist commonsense. The goal is not about capturing government by any compromise necessary, but winning the hearts and minds of working people with an honest and convincing message.

That kind of message has moral authority, and that moral authority offers enormous social power. With this approach, activists benefit far more than a majority of compromised seats in parliament, where corporate lobbyists and media pundits dictate the limits of 'acceptable activism.'

This is the kind of message that inspires people, and it is one bottom-up socialists can help deliver. To get a hearing, however, we must speak in a language others can understand, listen to (and learn from) others, earn the right to criticize through work on shared campaigns, and convey the value of bottom-up socialism. David Mandel, to his credit, has marched quite far down this road already. He stood as a candidate for QS in the last election. His ideas, if framed effectively, offer much for other QS members to consider. **R**

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Quebec's Passive Revolution

and the Contradictions of Neo-Provincialist Nationalism

Frédéric Guillaume Dufour

*The blood, the soil, the faith
These words you can't forget
Your vow, your holy place
O love aren't you tired yet?*
- Leonard Cohen, The Faith

During the last provincial election campaign, the *Action Démocratique du Québec* party (ADQ) had to get rid of two of its candidates – for their racist and sexist comments – and distanced itself from the anti-Semitic remark of another. Still, the right-wing political party came close to forming a minority government in Quebec on March 26th. Nobody expected the populist formation to be so successful. Conrad Black applauded the end of the province's social democratic parenthesis and, predictably, Jeffrey Simpson diagnosed it as yet another sign of the “disconnect” and “disengagement” of Quebec's francophone with English Canada. I contend that the breakthrough of the ADQ is indicative of a right-wing passive revolution both in Quebec and in Canada. This revolution has three components: (1) the realignment of all major political parties in Quebec – including the Green Party – toward a pro-capital orientation; (2) a reorientation of important forces within the nationalist forces toward a neo-provincialist nationalism; and (3) the undermining of the sovereignist project by a pan-Canadian conservative agenda. In what follows, I will focus essentially on the genesis and nature of the second component.

Surprise? What Surprise?

In recent Canadian history, the alliance of Quebec's nationalists with conservative forces in the rest of Canada has been the backbone of Conservative governments, of shifts to neoliberalism, and of economic and military continental integration. The same bloc of forces was behind the free-trade agreement of 1988. Since 1996, two former members of the Conservative Party – Lucien Bouchard and Jean Charest – have governed Quebec. Charest and Mario Dumont make no secret of their admiration for, and good relations with, Stephen Harper. At the federal level, the *Bloc Québécois* (BQ) played a key role in the fall of the Liberals and in unrolling the red carpet for the Tories in 2005. The BQ backed their budget in 2006 and in 2007. So what, exactly, is so surprising about the breakthrough of a populist party in Quebec?

Several factors explain the breakthrough's surprising character; for instance, the amateur and leader-centric nature of the party. A central reason of the “surprise” is that few had noticed the widening gap within the nationalist camp among factions summoning

different conceptions of the *nation québécoise*. Related to this myopia is the enduring misperception in Quebec that the nationalist bloc has an inherently social democratic DNA. While the first layer of myopia results from a methodological nationalism which conceals social contradictions under the national umbrella, the correlated layer stems from a fracture between the metropolitan intelligentsia and the rest of Quebec. Few in Montreal remember that eleven BQ deputies did not vote in favour of Bill C-38 in favour of gay marriage. On the intellectual terrain, the shift to the right was clear in the predictable pitch of *L'Action Nationale* and the conservative editorialist genre of *Argument*. *L'Action Nationale* is one of the nationalist movement's best known publications since 1917. Like most French journals which, since *Le Débat* in 1980, labeled themselves non-ideological, *Argument* is a center-right-leaning publication. Founded in 1998, it publishes some of Quebec's most influential essayists influenced by Leo Strauss, Alain Finkielkraut and Marcel Gauchet.

The shift to the right was also clear enough in the doom-laden tone of *Le manifeste des lucides*: “Alors que notre avenir est menacé par un déclin démographique et la concurrence mondiale, le Québec ne peut se permettre d'être la République du statu quo. (With demographic decline and global competition threatening our future, Québec cannot allow itself to be the republic of the status quo.)” It went on: “We are concerned. Concerned for the Québec we love. Concerned for our people, who have weathered many storms but who seem oblivious to the dangers that today threaten its future.” (See: www.pourunquebecclucide.com.) This was almost as dramatic as the opening chords of Poland's national anthem: “Poland has not yet perished.” The same trend was also framing the less sophisticated ‘documentary’ *L'illusion Tranquille*, and it had some echoes in the music group *Mes aïeux*'s mega-success “*dégénération*,” a nostalgic anthem, which sounded as if Lionel Groulx had made a musical breach. When the most successful song of a trendy neo-folk band blames young women for using abortion as a remedy for their “*conneries*,” it should come as no surprise that a populist leader like Dumont declares: “It's better to have a high birth rate than a seat at the United Nation.”

After all, Sir Black was accurate in stressing parallels between the ADQ and *l'Union Nationale*. The emphasis on family, high birth rate, provincial autonomy vis-à-vis Ottawa, and regional autonomy vis-à-vis the cities, were Duplessis's priorities. If history appears to repeat itself, however, it never does so in the same conditions. Contrary to the rhetoric of both nostalgic nationalists

and professional Quebec-bashers, the return to provincialism does not correspond to the awakening of an authentic national soul. It stems from different political processes, one of which is the maturation of the social and cultural contradictions of the *Parti Québécois* (PQ).

The PQ's Social and Cultural Contradictions

The coalition of forces tied to the creation of the PQ was socialized and empowered in the course of the Quiet Revolution. The party has been a central force in putting forward and advocating the political and cultural aspirations of a large portion of the francophone population. The latter came to form a confident middle and upper class benefiting largely from a Golden Age of social mobility, cultural emancipation and international recognition. During the 1990s, only political factions that had acquired their political capital during the anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s failed to notice the formation of a French-speaking ruling class in Quebec.

However, as early as the beginning of the 1980s, successive PQ governments had to mediate a mounting social contradiction between the party's Left, which wanted to expand struggles for economic emancipation and democratic participation, and a neoliberal trend which wanted to expand the social power of specific factions of *Quebec inc* – often in contradiction with the interests of the working class. Moreover, like many parties formed through the social struggles of the 1970s, the PQ governed under the auspices of increasing international capitalist competition. With Bouchard, it championed one austerity measure after another. Thus, like many western political formations during this period, the party progressively lost its credibility as a social democratic force. However, it did not entirely gain the trustworthiness of the new bourgeoisie that Parizeau's economic policies had freed from the bankers of Bay Street in favour of those of Wall Street.

The aftermath of the referendum of 1995 gave a particular direction to the participation of the nationalist intelligentsia in the western Left's retreat from struggles for redistribution into strug-

gles for recognition. While on the economic front, the PQ under Landry sought to reconcile a balanced budget with a social economy *à la* Third Way; on the political front, the intellectuals competed in distilling a politically resourceful concept of *nation québécoise*. The latter had to be both *civic*, to obtain international legitimacy, and *cultural*, to anchor Quebec's struggle for recognition to a credible and meaningful alternative to Canadian multiculturalism. In order to distinguish itself from the latter, the nationalists had to offer a political project anchored to the history of Quebec's Francophone majority. However, many also wanted to formulate a project with international legitimacy in a context where the fresh memories of the body count in Rwanda and the Balkans were not tuned to a project of ethnic-nation-building. In sum, the renewal of the nationalist project after 1995 was confronted with a cultural contradiction. While the cultural component of the PQ's nationalist project was increasingly washed out by its civic turn, its social content was reduced to a club of union leaders within the Party.

The PQ could not have chosen a greater tragedy than the rise and fall of André Boisclair to symbolize these contradictions. To start with, the decision to send the rising star of the party to the campaign with the mandate of undertaking a referendum as soon as possible had the allure of a ceremonial sacrifice. Then, the fresh new candidate had to mediate the tensions between the pro-capital wing of his party and the PQ's disciplined club of unionists. Yet, it was in his efforts to broaden the inclusive character of the party that Boisclair brought the PQ's cultural contradictions to a head. In a landscape already mined by the ADQ and the journalists' melodramatic coverage of the policies of reasonable accommodations, Boisclair, the Prince of political correctness, did not send out greetings *at Christmas* – the latter being a Christian holiday. The episode would have been anecdotal had it not played into the perception that the PQ had abandoned the cultural front in favour of a Plateau Mt-Royal-centred political project. It is the late awareness of the strength of this perception, exploited by the ADQ, that forced Boisclair to retreat from the proposal to remove the crucifix from the *Assemblée nationale*, and to express his outrage about women voting while wearing the Niqab. The vacuum created by the PQ's social and cultural contradictions →



and the unpopularity of the overconfident Liberal leader created momentum for the ADQ to occupy centrestage during Boisclair's last act.

Neo-Provincialism and Conservative Hegemony

The ADQ's success results from the combination of a drastic neoliberal agenda with the mobilization of neo-provincialist nationalism. This combination seduces the political right and speaks to nationalist and nostalgic insecurities while not scaring voters with a referendum. This neo-provincialism has four components. As a populism, it claims a discursive monopoly over *les vraies choses* and *le vrai monde*. The rhetoric combines the invention of tradition with the "defence" of a mythical representation of "who we are." Since its electoral victory in Vanier in 2004, the ADQ has played this card by relaying the so-called radio "shock jocks" in the Quebec City region. Second, this trend of nationalism ties back into Duplessism by emphasizing the family and rural values, dressed up in the clothes of our common values.* The ADQ had a full deck of cards to play against the PQ in this game.

While Dumont personified the paternalist father figure of the rural middle class rebelling against taxation, Boisclair, weakened by a drug scandal and in the line of fire of homophobic remarks, personified the refined metropolitan cosmopolite. During the campaign, the neo-provincialist carnival reached its climax when the *présidente de l'association des restaurateurs de cabane à sucre du Québec* argued that cooking lard-free pea soup for religious minorities was "unacceptable" because it endangered our traditions. Third, neo-provincialism exacerbates, on the one hand, tensions between the regions and the metropolis; and on the other hand, tensions between the so-called old and new parties. So far, this attempt has been especially successful in the white suburbs in the Centre of Quebec, but less successful in other regions: l'Outaouais, le Saguenay, la Côte-Nord, l'Abitibi, la Gaspésie and le Bas St-Laurent. Lastly, neo-provincialism advocates a flexible notion of "provincial autonomy" – whatever that means – not a state-building project.

Contrary to what Simpson argued, the ADQ's breakthrough has little to do with the "disengagement" and "disconnect" of Quebec's Francophones in relation to English Canada. The ADQ's neo-provincialist ideology provides a relay of the Conservative grand design. It supports the Tories' economic austerity policies. Its environmental programme has no teeth. It

advocates a model of disciplinary security forces, not crime prevention or programs of social rehabilitation. It applauds Harper's recognition of Quebec as a nation and the Conservatives' ruling on the fiscal imbalance. It has no international ambition. It cashes on Islamophobia on the home front, while it does not question the troops' involvement overseas. And last, not least, it abandons a state-building project. Harper could not have found in Quebec a vassal more "engaged in" and "connected to" the Canadian conservative bloc.

The Contradictions of Neo-Provincialism and the Renewal of Quebec's Left

With a fresh new leader, the PQ could make a swift comeback. The passive revolution achieved by the right will nonetheless force the left of the PQ and *Québec Solidaire* (QS) to rethink their political strategy. They will have to work with grassroots movements in a bottom-up fashion by being more sensitive to the mood of the population. Accordingly, both the PQ and QS should reconsider prioritizing sovereignty. Quebec's left will also have to make links outside Quebec and forge new alliances in the rest of Canada. No serious left-wing alternative in Quebec and Canada can afford the luxury of avoiding a much stronger collaboration between Quebec's left and the NDP. PQ's unionists club won't do it; QS might. The NDP will also have to be much more visible in Quebec and more in tune with Quebec's politics. Finally, the left will also have to read carefully the emerging contradictions of the new right.

Neo-provincialism's cultural contradiction is that it grows out of antagonizing both the regions vis-à-vis the metropolis, and the suburbs vis-à-vis an immigrant population with whom they make few (if any) reasonable accommodations in their everyday life. In order to form a majority government, its advocates will probably have to water down their position on both fronts and this could weaken the edge of their rhetorical, yet efficient, opposition between the old and new parties. However, it could also move further right in following the path of Sarkozy. In the last case, the clash between Montreal and the regions would further increase. Like any other neoliberal ideology in a context of international capitalist competition, neo-provincialism's principal social contradiction stems from the fact that the programmes of competitive austerity that it presented to the middle class as a solution is the source of its problems. After twenty years of neoliberal restructuring, social inequalities have been rising nationally and globally, and the American middle class has been shrinking. This model will have to be questioned, given that the solutions it pretends to deliver cannot be indefinitely postponed until after yet another round of cutbacks. **R**

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* On this point, I must disagree with Richard Fidler's analysis (*Relay*, May-June no. 17). While some right-wing populists, such as Stéphane Gendron, did express a secularist position, the ADQ has been more vague in advocating a selective defence of Quebec's *valeurs communes*. Unlike Gendron, it did not, for instance, take a stand to support Boisclair's initial proposal to remove the crucifix from the *Assemblée Nationale*.

The Good Imperialist?

Canada and the New Haiti

The Canadian government has a starring role in the continued occupation of Haiti. While the mainstream media had long blockaded critical analysis of the occupation, confusion resulting from Haiti's first post-coup election has led to a surfeit of information among the activist community. Greg Albo and Peter Graham interviewed Justin Podur and Kevin Skerrett, two Haiti solidarity activists, to find out what has happened since the election. •

Maybe we could start off with your assessment of the main reasons behind the intervention into Haiti by the U.S. and its allies against the Aristide government?

KS: My view is that the 2004 intervention into Haiti must be viewed as one part of an active phase of – primarily U.S. – interference in Haitian affairs that escalated with the emergence of an authentic, mass-based popular movement of Haiti's poor majority. This movement coalesced behind Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the "Lavalas" movement in the democratic elections of 1990.

That movement, and the stark social-economic polarization that characterizes Haiti, was recognized – correctly – as a serious ongoing threat to US strategic interests. Direct CIA backing for the murderous early-90s death squad known as FRAPH shows how acutely this was felt.

The explanation for Canada, and Québec having joined the U.S. government in what would ultimately be a "régime change" operation to overthrow Aristide is explained significantly in the strengthening bonds between the governments involved, and increasingly coordinated and shared agendas for the region (NAFTA, SPP, FTAA, etc.). The stubborn unwillingness of Aristide and the movement he represented to submit sufficiently to these agendas was embarrassing. The aid embargo and the February 2004 coup certainly sent a pretty clear message to all poor "recipient" countries of the region.

Haiti's special role in our racist, colonial history is also clearly a factor. When President Aristide began in 2003 to formally express demands for economic restitution from the French government for the crushing and odious debt-service that it forced on Haiti for many decades, he was giving voice to a rising movement



in many African communities for massive restitution and reparations for the damages inflicted by colonial and slave-trading powers. Aristide is now gone, and with him went this historic and legitimate demand, to the great relief of the three colonial powers (Canada, France and the U.S.) that removed him. One of the first statements of the coup government led by Gérard Latortue was that this demand was now withdrawn.

What has been the impact of the election of the Préval government on the occupation? How has it shifted the balance of power in Haiti between popular forces and the external interventionist forces?

JP: The resistance is getting re-organized. There have been some public expressions but I think there is much more going on at a lower profile. Patrick Elie, who was in Toronto a couple of months back, has argued that there is a new generation of very courageous young people who have been disconnected from the →



older generation. The best of that generation went to jail or to ground in 2004 while many others lost a lot of credibility when they collaborated or were silent in the face of the coup. Patrick at least wants to focus his efforts on building capacity and organization among the new generation.

Meanwhile the game between the foreign forces and the elite continues, with the elite's phony organizations calling for more force in the name of the people, etc. The Préval government is very constrained in what it can do. It managed to release some high-profile prisoners. But the major institutional effect of the 2004 coup was the cleansing of the Haitian Police of any decent or public-minded element. This cleansing was extended into every aspect of the government.

Préval's safety is guaranteed by members of the Haitian Police who he cannot trust. He can't move against the police and he can't make any other major moves because of the police. In this context even calling for the foreign forces to leave becomes a difficult decision. Préval had planned for a "social appeasement fund" for the poor neighbourhoods – that would have, in Patrick's view, cooled the situation down quite a bit – but the donor countries weren't interested in delivering the money even though they'd promised it.

KS: The Préval government depends on the three coup-backing governments for the bulk of the "development aid" that finances some 66% of his government's expenditures. Haiti remains militarily occupied by a UN force led and directed by these same powers. In this context, "national sovereignty" loses much of its meaning.

Washington's HOPE package for Haiti is another example of the Western powers attempting to offset their imperialist interven-

tions by alleged development assistance. What impact are these efforts having, if any?

KS: The HOPE Act is a special kind of U.S.-Haiti "free trade" deal aimed at fostering investment, primarily U.S. and international investment, into Haiti's brutal and exploitative apparel industry. This is done through eliminating certain restrictions and tariffs on U.S. textile imports from Haiti. Touted as Haiti's best hope for job creation, many pro-coup sectors in both Haiti and the U.S. are backers of this proposal. Critics point out, I think rightly, that such deals will serve to lock-in and deepen the exploitation of Haitian workers in nightmarish working conditions. This sweatshop development model will in fact be the realization of neoliberal planning, which emphasizes what is viewed as Haiti's sole comparative advantage: cheap, unorganized, immiserated labour. While the Préval government expresses support for the HOPE framework, major trade unions such as the Confédération des Travailleurs Haitiens were not consulted on its content.

A surprising aspect of the Préval government is that it has been participating in some of the ALBA alternative trade discussions for a social integration of Latin America with Venezuela, Cuba and others. Is there any significance to be attached to this? Is Haiti managing to develop an independent course even while foreign troops remain present?

JP: Préval is engaging in very sophisticated diplomacy. Préval wants stronger relationships with Cuba and Venezuela to reduce dependence on the coup countries (USA/Canada/France) and the complicit ones (Brazil/Argentina/Chile). Cuba continued its support for Haitians quietly (taking the medical students who were thrown out of university by marines and maintaining their medical program) throughout the coup era and can now do it more openly.

Venezuela similarly wants Préval to succeed just like he wanted Aristide to make it. But they all have obvious limits on what they can do, Préval most of all.

KS: It seems to me that Préval's daring diplomacy is also a risky game played between Washington and Caracas, something that likely can't last. At some point, the U.S. will force Préval to choose, and it's difficult, at this point, to imagine a definitive choice for anything but U.S. (and Canadian) leadership. Of course, this is partly due to the failure of the Canadian left to restrain our government.

Is there any indication yet of the impact of oil and other aid from Venezuela, and what distinguishes it from the aid from regional powers such as Canada and the U.S.?

KS: When President Chavez visited Haiti on March 12th of this year, he was welcomed with an outpouring of support from thousands of Haitians. He pointed out to those gathered that "there have been turbulent times here and in my country as a result of imperial aggression." The visit coincided with the announcement of an incredible \$1 billion (U.S.) support fund for Haiti established by the governments of Venezuela and Cuba. This package includes the provision of medical and health care personnel and training programs, four electricity generation stations, the construction of a new oil refinery and the provision of oil at a price discount equal to that available to the countries participating in ALBA (though Haiti is not an ALBA signatory). For two countries with such challenging domestic needs to provide such a massive support package is stunning - which probably explains why it was barely reported in the Canadian media.

Canada and the U.S. continue to channel much of their "aid" programs to pro-coup NGOs and the coercive apparatus (UN military forces and the Haitian National Police) that can be used to limit the Haitian government's room to maneuver. Militarily occupying Haiti is incredibly expensive, and the costs are tabulated as Canada's "aid" program to Haiti - for which Canadian self-congratulation is endless.

Let us turn to the Canadian side of the Haitian struggle. What role is Canada still playing in Haiti?

JP: Canada is still heavily involved with the Haitian police - training, supervising, and continuing to restructure the prison and justice system. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) still funds various Haitian NGOs to coordinate Haitian "civil society": its business and media elite and those political sectors that are most contemptuous of the population. Its multinationals - Gildan and SNC-Lavalin, for example, for whom the Haitian business elite are subcontractors - still take profits from Haiti's workers and territories. Haiti under Preval is far from a sovereign country, despite the intentions of Haiti's people or even Preval's government itself. To the degree that it is an international protectorate, the political agenda is set - for the UN troops, for the media, for the police, and for much of the government - from the U.S. and Canadian Embassies.

KS: It is also worth noting that Canada's notorious mining sector is moving quickly to capitalize on the "special" leadership role played by these embassies in Haiti. The Canadian mining company Eurasian Minerals has been spending the last number of months buying up exploration licenses for huge gold, silver, and copper projects in the north of Haiti, noting with approval Haiti's recently re-established "environment for investment and growth."

To wrap-up, what is the state of the Haitian solidarity movement right now internationally, and what is the current agenda for it in Canada?

JP: A decent communications infrastructure remains along with some capacity to hold events. The Canadian network has been using this time to build our connections to Haitian activists, connections we had to try to scramble to build as the coup was unfolding in 2004. An example of these connections is the very successful tour of labour and women's activists Euvonie Georges-Auguste and Ginette Apollon. These are the kind of people Canadian activists should be in touch with, hearing from, and trying to support, materially and politically.

As far as mass demonstrations in solidarity with Haiti, the capacity for that was always limited, and is more limited now. The main reason is the un-elected coup regime is gone and the president is the people's choice. That makes it a less brutal instance of imperialism and less instantly appalling to people hearing about it than the coup was.

My own critique of the network is that we don't seem to understand that Preval's election was a significant victory for the Haitian people, beyond what could have been expected given the forces arrayed against them. We describe the pre-coup, the coup, and then slip right into "and things have hardly changed" without pointing out the amazing achievement that was the election and the defense of the victory against massive attempted fraud. Without that, we risk thinking of Haitians as perpetual victims of foreign policy and not as independent agents in their own right who we can think alongside. We can't think of Préval as simply a puppet (or waiting for him to do puppet things) rather than seeing the opportunities and the possibilities that well-timed actions or mobilizations in Canada could open up for Haitians.

KS: Justin is absolutely right here. Clearly, decades of resisting have produced an incredible sophistication within Haiti's popular movements. I think that many activists in Canada's Haiti solidarity movement (myself included) have woken up quite a bit from the mistaken view that CIDA-funded NGOs operating in countries such as Haiti can be trusted. We need to learn and popularize these lessons further, and toss this racist "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine into the dustbin of imperialist history. For many of us, the agenda now is to use strategies such as the recent tour of Haitian labour and women's movement leaders to underline how damaging Canada's role has been while simultaneously demonstrating what real relations of people-to-people solidarity might look like. **R**



Zdravko Saveski

One of the major consequences of communist rule in Eastern Europe is the virtual annihilation of class consciousness in the working class. The workers exited from communism without perceiving themselves as workers, without realizing that struggle is crucial for gaining rights and underestimating the importance of trade unions and other workers' organizations. The future seemed bright: democratic and – consumerist.

After the fall of communism, the left was in retreat throughout the world. The defeat of communism didn't mean greater support for alternative left currents, instead, it meant winning the masses to capitalism – for the unrestrained, neoliberal form of capitalism. Eastern Europe was the region where this was most true.

Before the fall of communism in the former Yugoslavia, some thought the country, which had a genuine revolution unlike the situation in the other Eastern European countries, would escape the destiny of its neighbours. That didn't happen. Neither the lower levels of repression nor the self-management model made a difference. The economic crisis and the allure of Western consumerism were the major factors that brought the end of the communist regime in Yugoslavia, as in the rest of Eastern Europe.

The ethnic hatred from the past woke up from its slumber, stimulated by the economic crisis and the economic disputes among the republics of the former Yugoslavia. This brought the country to the brink of collapse and war, only a short time after the peaceful transition from communism.

During this process of dissolution, the Republic of Macedonia, Yugoslavia's most southern republic, gained independence in 1991. It was one of the poorest republics with a lot of economic and political issues to be solved. But the people were quite content in general. A national statehood had been gained, together with the recent freedom and democracy.

The newly-independent state faced a lot of challenges from the start. One of the most serious was the difficulty in gaining international recognition due to the dispute with its southern neighbour, Greece, concerning its constitutional name. This dispute still isn't resolved and even if it is far less a serious problem than 15

years ago, it still requires considerable attention and is perceived as a crucial issue by the Macedonian people.

This dispute is one of the major reasons for the preoccupation with ethnic issues, so easily aroused by the nationalist political parties and other organizations. Another reason for this preoccupation is the tension between the majority ethnic Macedonian population and the biggest ethnic minority – Albanians. This tension escalated in a low-intensity war in 2001, further deepening the ethnic divide between the two peoples.

Of course, this preoccupation with ethnic and state-building issues has created an unfavorable climate for the left. Another crucial unfavorable factor is the level of acceptance of capitalism as an economic system. To be sure, the Republic of Macedonia hasn't prospered as a result of the change to its socio-economic system. It took 15 years for the GNP to reach the 1990 level, the unemployment rate is constantly above 30% and the poverty rate has climbed around the 30% mark. But capitalism, even unrestrained capitalism, isn't questioned. The reason is the mass belief in a myth, in the myth of transition. It claims that the problems are inherent to the transitional phases from communism to "market economy," but when we surpass that difficult but inevitable phase we'll have something like a Scandinavian, welfare model of capitalism. Without struggle, automatically.

The most intriguing aspect of this approach is that the more benevolent phase of capitalism is to be achieved by enhancing free market, neoliberal, unrestrained capitalism. The current conservative government has recently introduced a flat tax of 12% ("the lowest tax in the world"), and the number of critical voices was shamefully low. The lack of a dissident tradition from the days of communism has continued into the current capitalist phase. The Republic of Macedonia is a country with very few neoliberal dissidents and a country where capitalist propaganda is most effective.

This is, consequently, a big failure for the left in the Republic, no matter the objective obstacles and the subjective characteristics of the population. There are several challenges that left activists in the Republic of Macedonia face.

1. Struggle against neoliberal and capitalist propaganda.

The propaganda of the supporters of the capitalist system is powerful throughout the world. The increasing power of the media and the constant growth in the knowledge of how to manipulate human beings makes the task more and more difficult.

The situation in Eastern Europe is even worse due to the lack of developed class consciousness. In the Republic of Macedonia there is a real deficit of modern progressive literature, of news and analyses from a left perspective as well as diffusion of left culture through movies and music. Yes, there are activists that use the available media (mainly blogs and left internet sites) offering left news, analyses, texts, books, and disseminating CDs with songs and movies with left inclinations; there are also publishing houses that sometimes surprise us by publishing left books.

But the effects are too weak. For example, there are very few people here who have heard about the biggest post-communist socialist project, the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela. If they have heard about Hugo Chavez, their perception, at best, is that he is an opponent of the U.S. foreign policy. Others believe that he is some kind of dictator with communist orientation. The mass media does not inform its consumers about the achievements of the Venezuelan government. All of the positive aspects of the Bolivarian revolution are unknown to the Macedonian public, strongly convinced in the neoliberal mantra that there is no alternative.

2. Establish contacts with the masses.

In general, most of the leftist activists in the Republic of Macedonia aren't poor, aren't the biggest losers of the "transition." On the other hand, the losers of the "transition" generally don't have class consciousness and aren't organized. There are unions and there are strikes too. Some labour organizers are really dedicated to the struggle for protecting workers' rights. But there are virtually no links between the unions and the left activists. The union federations are informally but strongly linked to the two major political parties, none of which protects the workers' interests. They protest – when the other political party is in power – and are "content with the social dialogue" – when "their" political party is in power.

The unions are bureaucratic and often lack energy, skills and knowledge in defending workers' rights. In such a situation, left activists are generally unwilling to try to work together with the unions.

As for the political parties, the picture is just as bleak. The main "leftist" party, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), the successor of the former League of Communists of Macedonia, has a social democratic orientation in theory, but in practice is quite typically neoliberal. When in power, the SDSM has privatized, deregulated and taken away workers' rights. In 2005, a leading member of the SDSM blamed the party of abandoning its social democratic orientation and left the party to form the New Social Democratic Party (NSDP). The Macedonian left saw some hope in the formation of the NSDP, but soon came the

disappointment. After the 2006 parliamentary elections, the NSDP entered the VMRO-DPMNE-led conservative government. The government is pursuing an extreme neoliberal agenda, including the introduction of the flat tax, but the NSDP, social democratic by orientation (!), has not left the government. Given such social democratic parties, every attempt of entryism seems futile.

3. Overcome the nostalgia for the communist past.

Among the losers of the transition, if they are not victims of the capitalist propaganda or nationalist sentiments, is a virtual nostalgia for the former communist regime. The social standards were high in the former Yugoslavia, the repression – low, and the communist leader, Josip Broz Tito, very popular. Comparing the present with the former system, the common people are ignoring the issue of democracy-dictatorship and tend to concentrate on the social issues. And the nostalgia for communism arises.

This is a serious problem for socialists. Both the opponents and the supporters of social justice equate defense of the workers and the poor with communism and if someone insists on attacking the undemocratic nature of the communist regime as well as Tito's behaviour and policies, they risk losing the support of many potential opponents of the current system. There were some influential left dissidents in the former Yugoslavia, such as the Praxis school of philosophy with world-class thinkers like Gajo Petrovic, but they are unknown even in today's leftist circles. Much to the frustration of the non-communist left in the Republic of Macedonia, Tito is the primary symbol of the opposition to the current system.

4. Cooperation among all the left currents.

There are Titoists, Trotskyists, anarchists, left socialists, social democrats and pacifists in the Republic of Macedonia. The fundamental differences among them are very difficult to overcome, but there are issues like opposition to neoliberalism or to the war in Iraq where various leftists in the Republic can cooperate. Too often the distrust has been a barrier for cooperation, but given the weakness of the left in the Republic of Macedonia, the more the leftists are aware of the need for mutual cooperation the better.

As can be seen, the situation with socialist organizing in the post-communist Republic of Macedonia is very bad. However, I still have hope. There was a leading Macedonian poet and communist, Koco Racin, who in the 1930s, in times of dictatorship in Yugoslavia and the spread of fascism in Europe, used to tell his comrades over and over again: "We'll prevail!" If Racin could believe in the 1930s that we'll prevail, then I can also say nowadays: We'll prevail! **R**

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Report Back on the Immigrant Rights Movement in North America

Yen Chu

During the week of May Day, cities across North America took to the streets to call for full regularization for all non-status immigrants and an end to detention and deportations.

VANCOUVER

On May 1, about 500 people marched in Vancouver to declare that 'immigrant rights are workers rights.' A week before, No One is Illegal-Vancouver occupied the offices of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency to demand a meeting with Immigration Minister Diane Finley and to demand an end to detentions and deportations. No One is Illegal stickers were plastered throughout the office, and occupiers chanted, demanding justice for all non-status immigrants. Two days later, No One is Illegal Vancouver returned to the Immigration office and successfully shut it down by bolting the front doors with a U-lock.

MONTREAL

On May 5th about 700 people in Montreal marched through the mostly immigrant Parc Extension neighbourhood in a protest that ended with a community fair. Demonstrators wore masks to show solidarity for the many undocumented immigrants who are forced to hide their identities. The march, organized by Solidarity Across Borders, also showed solidarity for Abdelkader (Kader) Belaoui who was forced into sanctuary at St. Gabriel's Church in Montreal after his refugee claim was turned down and he was faced with a deportation order. Kader is a blind Algerian who fled the civil war in 1996. He has been living in the church for over a year and there is an ongoing campaign to fight for his status. For more information on Kader go to www.soutienpourkader.net.

TORONTO

Organized by No One is Illegal-Toronto, over 2,000 people marched through the streets to demand a broad, inclusive regularization program and an end to detentions and deportations, as well as access to city services regardless of immigration status. Trade unionists such as the Canadian Auto Workers, Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation marched together with immigrant community groups such as the Workers Action Centre, the Coalition of Concerned Taxi Drivers, the Philippine Women's Centre and SIKLAB to declare that "Immigrant Rights are Worker's Rights!" They marched from Christie Pits Park to Dufferin Grove Park for a community concert and fair. Last year, this neighbourhood was subjected to arbitrary immigration checks by Canada Border Service Agents at subway stations, in malls

and on the streets. No One is Illegal held its second National Day of Action in this neighbourhood to show solidarity and strength in the fight against the intimidation and attacks on this immigrant community by Immigration Canada.

This year, the march also celebrated the success of the Access Without Fear: Don't Ask Don't Tell Campaign. The campaign over the past year has been fighting to win access to essential city services for people without status by having municipal workers not ask for immigration status and that immigration status not be shared with federal authorities. Major gains have been made at the Toronto Police Services Board, the Toronto District School Board as well as in community centres and health centres. The Police Services Board is in the process of implementing a partial don't ask policy where victims and witnesses of crime will not be asked for their status. The Toronto District School Board have implemented a full policy where no student will be asked for their status and they will not share immigration information with immigration enforcement. They have also declared school sanctuary zones by opposing the entrance of immigration enforcement into schools.



The demonstration also included a family facing deportation to Mexico. Angelica and her children, Edgar and Vanessa, spoke to supporters at the rally expressing their desire to stay. The family of four, including the father Abraham, came to Canada as refugees to flee persecution by Mexican police. Despite a letter supporting their claim of a lack of state protection from Amnesty International, they face deportation. Their case as well as Kader's case highlights the injustice of the refugee determination system, which is often arbitrary and inaccessible. The family exhausted its life savings on legal fees and applications and lacks the funds to apply for asylum on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

UNITED STATES

In the USA, large May Day rallies, only surpassed by last year's turnout, took place across the country. Last year's 'the Great American Boycott saw millions of people out on the street to protest for regularization and against the HR 4437 bill, legislation that criminalize immigrants by making it a felony to be in the States without status. The bill also criminalized those who assisted non-status immigrants with exorbitant fines and prison sentences. It increased immigration enforcement and gave local police authority to enforce immigration law. It also proposed a 700-mile fence along the U.S.-Mexican border.

The lower numbers comparable to last year were attributed to the lack of a unifying factor such as last year's HR4437. However, rallies took place nationwide with thousands of people out on the streets in cities across the United States including Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Tuscan to call for a full regularization program and an end to detentions and deportation. Hundreds turned out in other cities across the USA.

Over the past year, Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) have brutally increased detentions and deportations. A few days before the May Day rally in Chicago, ICE raided a shopping mall located in a Mexican-American community called La Villita. Employees and customers were detained and questioned at gunpoint. Community members immediately began to protest the intimidation and violence by ICE.

The violence against immigrants is not limited to ICE. In Los Angeles, the LAPD attacked a peaceful May Day rally in MacArthur Park. Wielding batons and firing rubber bullets into the crowd, police used indiscriminate violence to attack protestors including children and the elderly.

These violent attacks have galvanized the immigrant rights movement to not only fight back against the attack on their communities, but on the violent suppression of the movement itself. The attacks only further highlighted the violence that immigrant and refugees face everyday.

The recent Senate Immigration Reform Plan which was recently defeated, further highlighted the ongoing racist repression and exploitation of immigrants. Many immigrant communities and activists opposed the reforms, which included many elements of the HR4337 by criminalizing non-status immigrants and increasing military style enforcement as well as an onerous, impossible path to citizenship.

The reforms required non-status immigrants to leave the country for one year and then pay \$5,000 in fines before being able to obtain a green card. A new three-year workers visa would be in place with a cost of \$500 with the ability to renew but with a \$500 renewal fee. If visa holders are found to be unemployed for more than 60 days they are required leave the country. The proposed reforms would also put greater restrictions on fam-

ily reunification, preventing the sponsorship of siblings and adult children, and putting a cap on the sponsorship of parents.

The reforms also included a proposal for a point-system much like the one that exists in Canada, which has a system designed to exclude and exploit the poor and working class, as the point system gives points to those who have higher level of education and income. This is ironic since Canada has increasingly been shaping their immigration policies to be in line with the USA. The proposal of a point system in the U.S. is just another strategy to streamline immigration policy throughout North America. The reform bill failed to pass as a result of opposition from both the left and the right. The latter falsely labelled it an amnesty bill.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

No One is Illegal is already starting to organize against the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), which is essentially a merging of economic free trade and national security policies. George W Bush, Stephan Harper, and Felipe Calderon are meeting on August 21, 2007 for a summit to forward SPP agreements in Montebello, Quebec. Their plan is to further corporate free trade, border militarization and the criminalization of migration. This agenda is inextricable linked to further the profits of the capitalist class, while immigrants, refugees and the working class pay the price.

In June, a motion for a moratorium on deportations for undocumented workers was passed in parliament. However, the Conservatives did not support the motion. A Standing Committee on a moratorium was started last year in response to high profile deportations of workers in the construction industry particularly in the Portuguese and Latin American communities. The moratorium is not policy unless it has the support of the Conservatives, who have 120 days to respond to the motion. Hearings on the motion are being held in the fall. The on-the-ground mobilizations by immigrant communities and activists are certainly a contributing factor in this motion. They are continuing to mobilize to ensure that the moratorium and a regularization program is full and inclusive ensuring status for all.

The lower numbers at this year's May Day rallies compared to last year's does not cast a shadow on the immigrant rights movement because communities are continuing to organize throughout North America. However, there are challenges that lie ahead for the movement with divisions between views on temporary workers programs, which have been supported by some North American unions as a solution for people without status. This is misguided, as temporary workers programs only further exploit non-status immigrants, as they often face deportation if they do not accept the employer's working conditions. The immigrant rights movement has the potential to become a strong broad-based working-class movement if it refuses to accept any solution that would continue the criminalization, oppression and exploitation of immigrants. The movement must stand in solidarity to demand status for all; this demand is part of the working-class struggle against neoliberalism, globalization, war and imperialism. **R**

Yen Chu is a Toronto-based activist.

Operation Return to Sender:

A Historical Pattern of Immigration Raids

Jose Calderon

In California, a series of immigration raids, named Operation Return to Sender by Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) officials, in recent months, resulted in the arrests of over 760 immigrants. As part of this deportation project, the raids have resulted in more than 13,000 arrests nationwide. Calling them “sweeps” rather than raids, Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials claimed that their enforcement was only aimed at targeted fugitives who had overstayed their visas or who had ignored deportation orders. Yet, numerous eyewitness and news media accounts reported that this was not fully the case. The *San Francisco Chronicle* newspaper, in a January 23rd article reported that ICE agents, in addition to the so-called 119 immigrant criminals that they targeted in Contra Costa County, “also picked up 94 other undocumented immigrants they encountered in the process.” In an article by the *Associated Press* on January 23rd, where reporters rode along for the first day of the “sweeps” in Orange County, they reported that the agents “fanned out to houses in Anaheim and Santa Ana” and that the criminal fugitive that they arrested was merely a 29-year-old undocumented immigrant “wanted for a driving under the influence conviction.” At a second stop, where the agents were looking for a “convicted rapist” (that had moved out weeks before), they “instead, arrested six men who could not provide legal papers.” Timothy Aiken, deputy director of ICE in San Francisco, commented “We want to go after the worst of the worst; we go after people who have ignored a judge’s order – but we can’t be blind to someone who doesn’t have lawful status in the U. S. We wouldn’t be doing our job if we ignored these people.” By their own words, immigration officials admitted that their actions were random, creating a climate of fear and tension in immigrant communities.

In the city of Pomona, there were various eyewitness accounts where immigration agents used the pretext of going after so-called “convicted fugitives” to stop and detain people randomly. For example, the husband of Pomona resident Maria Morales, a mother of two children, was picked up off the street as he walked to his job. In an incident near the Pomona Day Labor Center, ICE agents claim that they went to the area in search of a “criminal.” Eyewitnesses, instead, saw them chase after immigrant workers who were looking for jobs in that area. Similar reports emerged from residents at a local apartment complex in Pomona where, under the pretext of looking for a “fugitive” began to knock on doors and arrest individuals randomly.

These types of actions are confirmed as occurring in other parts of California by Jerry Okendo, President of the Northern California League of United Latin American Citizens chapter. He is quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle* as criticizing ICE agents for carrying out “sweeps” in the cities of Concord and Richmond without “properly identifying themselves” and carrying out arrests without search warrants. According to Okendo, ICE agents

“were sweeping through apartment complexes and picking up anyone who could not provide proof they were living in the United States legally.” Richmond City Councilman John Marquez complained that ICE agents “were identifying themselves as police” helping to break up the good relations that he said had been established between the police department and the Latino Community.

Historical Pattern of Immigration Raids

The character of these recent raids follow a historical pattern by the U. S. government to round up immigrants when the country is experiencing an economic downturn or when there are social conditions and cutbacks that need a scapegoat. When the economy went downward during the depression of the 1930s, for example, the *U. S. Government* gave consular offices the charge of deporting anyone who might add to the “public charge” rolls.” During this period, at least half a million people of Mexican origin were put on trains and deported. In the early years of the depression, any Mexican-origin person who applied for welfare, unemployment, or any type of social service was forced to leave the country under the U.S. government category of “voluntary repatriation.” Approximately half of those deported were U.S. citizens, a clear violation of both their civil and human rights.

Raising concerns over national security issues as a result of World War II, the U.S. government instituted the Smith Act in 1941 to deny visas and deport anyone who “might endanger the public safety.” A similar bill, the Internal Security Act, was passed in 1950 to deport anyone suspected of being a member of the Communist Party or any of its affiliated organizations.

When the U. S. entered World War II, and there was a need to fill labor shortages in agriculture, the federal government established the Bracero Program. The program was extended after the war as Public Law 78 and was justified as a means of meeting labor shortages caused by the Korean War. The program ended in 1964 with 5 million Mexicans used in the peak years between 1954 and 1962. With the establishment of a regulated labor pool, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service began a massive drive known as “Operation Wetback” to deport undocumented immigrants to Mexico. Again, similar to the round-ups of immigrants during the depression, Operation Wetback grossly violated the civil rights of Mexican immigrants including those who were legally in the U. S. as citizens and permanent residents. Hundreds of Mexican-origin people were arrested and harassed. They were threatened and forced to produce “proof” of their citizenship. Only a few of the thousands of those deported had formal hearings. When the project ended, more than a million persons had been deported to Mexico.



Contemporary Conditions for Raids

In this contemporary period, on an international level, there is a movement of immigrants from poorer countries to more developed ones. The response in the U. S. and in European countries has been twofold: on the one hand, the companies (and even some government officials) see the need for immigrants to fill employment voids (particularly when these countries are faced with an aging population). On the other hand, these countries do not want to acknowledge them as human beings with basic human rights.

There are “open borders” for multi-national corporations when it comes to investment, trade, and moving jobs. However, when it comes to the free migration of immigrants, the meaning of democracy does not exist. That is why there is a backlash to this meaning of democracy in Latin America where a growth in international investment has meant increasing unemployment and the forced removal of the peasantry from their rural lands to the urban cities.

Up until September 11, 2001, there was a movement toward some form of legalization for the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U. S. However, after September 11th, the issue of immigration became a national security issue. The most significant measure was the passage of the USA Patriot Act which allowed wide latitude for law enforcement agencies to conduct searches, to use electronic surveillance, and to detain persons suspected of being terrorists. The act expanded the definition of “terrorists” for the purposes of removing any immigrants certified by the U. S. Attorney General as having engaged in terrorist activities.

The Raids and National Security

It is in this climate that California experienced the recall of Governor Gray Davis in November, 2003 and where his opponents raised the specter of immigration as an issue of national security. The eventual Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger – who had sup-

ported Proposition 187 (a ballot initiative to deny social services, healthcare, and public education to undocumented immigrants) and had been listed on the board of an organization, U.S. English, *that advocates the exclusive use of English in public institutions* – used the issue of national security as a reason for turning down a bill that would have given immigrants the right to obtain a driver’s license. In accordance with this perspective, U.S. Border Patrol officials have argued that the immigration raids are connected to the “war on terrorism.” When Tomas Jimenez of the Border Patrol was asked by a reporter for the reasons the 2004 raids were carried out, he responded that “the mission of the Border Patrol, the primary objective at this time, is to prevent the entering of terrorists and terrorist arms to the United States.”

An important lesson in the aftermath of the recent immigration raids was the response by Mexican and Latino organizations in the Inland Valley of California.

Within a week of immigration raids in 2004, various organizations including *Estamos Unidos*, *Hermanidad Mexicana de Ontario*, the *Latina and Latino Roundtable*, and the *Riverside-based National Alliance for Human Rights* came together and organized a seven-mile march calling for an immediate stop to the raids. The march, beginning in the city of Ontario and ending in Pomona, drew an estimated 10,000 participants. The Spanish language newspaper *La Opinion* called it the largest demonstration in the history of the region. Similarly in 2007, after similar immigration raids, a coalition of organizations including the *Labor Council for Latin American Advancement*, the *Latina/o Roundtable*, *CHIRLA*, *Latino Student Union*, and the *National Day Labor Organizing Network* came together and organized a march calling for an immediate stop to the raids.

Rise of a Proactive Trend

Immigrants have moved beyond solely reacting to the attacks on them as criminals and as threats to national security being made by the U.S. government, various politicians, the border patrol and right-wing anti-immigrant groups. The emerging trend in the immigrant rights movement is the rise of coalitions that are uniting diverse groups and communities in advancing strategies and policies aimed at turning back the post-September 11th provisions that have increased the categories of “deportable” crimes and that have further criminalized undocumented workers. This emerging trend demanding “legalization” for the 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. has shown how a united proactive response can be effective in exposing the scapegoating of immigrants, mobilizing support for pro-immigrant legislative policies, and building broad community-based coalitions to defend the civil and human rights of all immigrants and their supporters. **R**

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An Agenda for Change?

CUPE Ontario's 2007 Convention

Stephanie Ross

CUPE Ontario emerged from its recent convention in Windsor, Ontario with an ambitious action plan and a renewed resolve to challenge the union's structure – which has often been called the union's greatest strength and its greatest weakness. With the St. Clair Centre for the Arts bursting at the seams with delegates, the largest convention in CUPE Ontario's history embraced, at least in principle, a highly politicized approach to collective bargaining as well as a programme for regionalization of decision-making and resources. In a union which has always been reluctant to make radical shifts in structure and internal power relations, CUPE Ontario's *Agenda for Change* document offers up a fairly radical challenge to both CUPE's national leadership and the many large locals who have always been staunch defenders of local autonomy. The enduring tensions between different visions of the union's purpose, and the proper structure needed to carry out that purpose, were on full display and manifested themselves in a variety of different debates.

The entire convention was charged in the aftermath of two recent key events. First, there was a lingering hangover from the 2006 convention's passage of Resolution 50, which committed the Ontario Division to solidarity and education work on the issue of the "apartheid nature of the Israeli state" and to "support the international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions" until Israel recognizes Palestine's legitimate right to self-determination. Despite the resolution passing handily, the intense backlash from the media, Zionist groups, and sections of some locals' memberships raised the spectre of an attempt to reconsider and rescind the resolution. In anticipation, members of the Division's International Solidarity Committee were busily distributing an excellent background on the issue, entitled CUPE Ontario's Resolution 50: Towards Peace and Justice in the Middle East.

Second, intense feelings generated by the very long and difficult round of collective bargaining between CUPE National and its three staff unions, in which the National demanded concessions on pensions and which resulted in a brief strike in March, were still very much in evidence. The Division Executive joined a long list of locals and district councils from across the country who sent reams of support letters to the staff unions during negotiations, expressing their profound opposition to the National's violation of its own longstanding anti-concessions bargaining policy for CUPE members. Locals not only had to do without staff at key moments in bargaining and arbitration hearings; they were also robbed of the moral high ground of a consistent anti-concessions policy at their own bargaining tables, placing many in very difficult positions with respect to their employers. Several

debates were pervaded by expressions of appreciation for the staff (bringing people to their feet repeatedly) as well as anger at the National, and both Paul Moist and Claude Genereux were in damage control mode for much of the convention.

Agenda for Change's regionalization proposals were framed by frustration with the National Office, but not merely over the needless conflict with staff. The document calls for a major rethinking of CUPE's overall structure and internal relationships, and asks whether they are best suited to engage the issues, institutions and power structures that shape public sector workers' lives. In particular, the importance of provincial government legislation and funding decisions requires both regional and political campaigns as well as coordinated sectoral bargaining. Sectoral bargaining has become increasingly urgent in several sectors, especially social services, given the fragmented nature of service delivery and the resulting archipelago of small employers and bargaining units. In this context, meaningful gains on wages, benefits and pensions, especially for the women and people of colour who staff these workplaces, are impossible.

Agenda for Change therefore links together several key goals: consolidated bargaining strength; regionalized decision-making, and more resources from the National are all crucial to winning pensions and \$15/hour for all CUPE members within 6 years; advancing the equality agenda; and organizing those sectors of part-time, low-paid and marginalized workers. Add to this a very detailed *2007 Action Plan*, which put forth an ambitious set of interlocking political, bargaining and organizing campaigns in all of CUPE's key sectors as well as the central issue areas of equality and political action.

However, both *Agenda for Change* and the *Action Plan* strike at the heart of the historic bargain which made CUPE possible and has kept it a decentralized national union of relatively autonomous locals. In order to make sectoral and regional decision-making meaningful, control over resources – both staff and money – will have to follow. Opposition to this comes from above and below the Division level. The National Office has always feared that a strengthening of provincial divisions or sectoral groups would allow them to split off and form their own competing organization. Opposition from particular locals also endures. Even though both documents passed overwhelmingly, with much excitement, and with the link between collective bargaining and political action convincingly and repeatedly made, several large locals in the municipal sector continue to defend autonomy, not least because they have greater bargaining power on their own than do many of CUPE's locals in much more decentralized sectors. By

coding autonomy as democracy, certain segments of the union can mask the sectionalism which informs their position and block progressive initiatives that call on the membership to expand the boundaries of their activity, solidarity and identity.

Of course, money is always the real test of how ready CUPE's membership is to follow through with a structural reorganization. Resources are central to CUPE Ontario's capacity to carry out the *Action Plan*, and *Agenda for Change* is a major strategy for accessing those resources. However, the results of that approach won't be known until October 2007, when the Division presents its proposals to CUPE's National Convention in Toronto. In the meantime, a second strategy was an increase of 22 cents in monthly per capita dues paid to the Division. However, despite an impassioned speech by Division President Sid Ryan, opponents convinced enough delegates to vote against; the resolution passed the 50% mark, but did not garner the two-thirds majority needed to make a constitutional change. A revised proposal for an 11-cent increase passed quite handily on Saturday.

The dues debate carried within it an interesting and ironic twist, and it was here the Resolution 50 made its reappearance. Several large municipal locals used Resolution 50 to back up their refusal to vote for a dues increase if the money would be used for political awareness campaigns (not to mention the printing of the Resolution 50 backgrounder). Channelling the ghost of former AFL president Samuel Gompers, Anne Dembinski, president of Local 79 (inside workers at the City of Toronto), argued that politics only serves to divide union members and weaken them at the bargaining table. Hence, the union should remain neutral on broader political questions and focus only on what it does best – collective bargaining. Strangely, also speaking against the dues increase, albeit for reasons of process, were the very activists central to Resolution 50's passage, and who in general support the vision of the *Action Plan* and *Agenda for Change*. Meeting as the Action Caucus, these members problematized the lack of advance notice and education about the need for a dues increase, which, they claimed, gave locals little time to debate the issue and instruct their delegates. Whether true or not, this intervention aided the more conservative locals in their bid to restrain the Division by diluting the coalition in favour of a much more politicized CUPE Ontario, particularly where it really counts: the financial resources to make the Action Plan a reality.

All this speaks to the broader question of what Left strategy can be in the context of a union like CUPE, whose leadership itself is often to the Left of many locals and members. What can an "action" caucus contribute when the action plan presented by



the executive board is so comprehensive, politicized, and full of radical potential if realized? While maintaining the democratic accountability of the leadership is always paramount, the left must be careful not to lose sight of the larger strategic picture by focussing on process for its own sake, particularly if it means undermining the very kinds of campaigns it passionately advocates. Also, by cutting the dues increase in half, the success of CUPE Ontario's *Action Plan* depends heavily upon what happens at National Convention, and whether Ontario delegates are able to convince other provinces that they too will benefit from a shift in CUPE's internal relationships. Given CUPE's past record, which has seen the union reject major structural changes despite support from the National executive on three separate occasions, activists will have their work cut out for them this fall. **R**

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Building Union Power from the Bottom Up:

A Response to Ross' "Agenda for Change? CUPE Ontario's 2007 Convention"

Members of the CUPE Ontario Action Caucus

In "Agenda for Change? CUPE Ontario's 2007 Convention," Stephanie Ross poses a question of significance to activists in several unions today: "what Left strategy can be in the context of a union like CUPE, whose leadership itself is often to the Left of many locals and members"?

In her article the recent CUPE Ontario convention appears to have had three main actors: 1) a progressive leadership with a "radical" *Agenda for Change*, which is being constrained by 2) a more conservative CUPE National and large locals that want to maintain local autonomy, and 3) activists grouped around the International Solidarity Committee and the Action Caucus.

In her account, this third group appeared out of step with the leadership's progressive agenda, unwittingly obstructing their efforts, at times even bolstering the ranks of conservative forces in key debates on the convention floor. In addition to criticising what she sees as their lack of strategy, Ross raises the question of the role of an activist base in a union with a progressive leadership. While this is a serious question with no easy answers, it is unclear from Ross' article what an activist base might offer in such a context. She asks, "What can an "action" caucus contribute when the action plan presented by the executive board is so comprehensive, politicized, and full of radical potential if realized?"

She cites two issues to illustrate her point. First is the impact of Resolution 50 from the 2006 convention, which she describes as a "hangover." Rather than a ground-breaking achievement for the international labour movement, Ross only notes how it was used by one delegate (who believes that the union should remain neutral on broader political issues) to obstruct the leadership's progressive agenda. In reality, most of the "backlash" against the union's position on Israeli apartheid has not been from CUPE members, but from the media and Zionist groups outside the union. Activists were busily distributing materials not in anticipation of a possible rescind motion, as Ross suggests, but as a way to implement the education mandate of the resolution (it was known long in advance that no local had submitted a resolution to rescind Resolution 50).

What she failed to notice, however, was the positive impact of this resolution on the union – not in terms of policies, but something much more important to building union power. While Resolution 50 was met with opposition, it also mobilized a new layer of CUPE activists (and inspired many long-time activists as well). By taking a bold and principled position and actually following through on a resolution from convention, by training a group of

about 20 union activists (many of whom had never been active in the union) and sending them to run educational workshops on the issue at Locals, Sectorial Conferences, Equity Committees, Executive Board, as well as Local and Regional Council Meetings across the province, this resolution has breathed new life into the activist base of CUPE Ontario.

At issue here is a difference of opinion about the role of activists in the union. Ross worries about activists being a nuisance or alienating themselves from a progressive leadership that is trying to adopt a progressive action plan in the struggle over institutional position. Her primary focus appears to be the adoption of this agenda at convention. In contrast, it is our contention that the strength of the activist base is much more important than any agenda adopted at convention, and that without an activist base no action plans can be implemented, even in a union with a progressive leadership like CUPE Ontario. While Ross focuses on the debate around the union's action plan, the activists, having seen many such action plans and recognizing their limits when they are translated from paper into practice, are trying to build a base that is capable of putting even the most limited objectives into practice. Until that happens all the action plans, however "full of radical potential," will not be realized. Consequently, much more thought needs to be put into how to build such a base.

This difference illuminates the rationale behind some of the activists' opposition to the proposed dues increase – Ross' second example of how some activists frustrated the progressive plans of the leadership. "Meeting as the Action Caucus," writes Ross, "these members problematized the lack of advance notice and education about the need for a dues increase, which, they claimed, gave locals little time to debate the issue and instruct their delegates." She goes on to caution that "the left must be careful not to lose sight of the larger strategic picture by focussing on process for its own sake."

Ross is correct that failure to approve the full dues increase proposal hurt some of the very activists who were raising concerns about the process by which this decision was being made – the lack of membership involvement and the disproportionate cut to committee budgets. However, openly challenging the leadership on using tactics that weaken the union speaks less to a lack of strategic vision, than to the strength of their conviction that the power of a union often has more to do with *how* it makes decisions than with what decisions are made in the end. Failure to confront the leadership on how it relates to the activists and the rank and file in favour of short-term budgetary gains only weakens the union in the long-term.

The agenda for change itself and the way the dues increase was presented clearly speak to the problems around the way decisions are made in the union and the failure to include the activists who will be implementing agendas in the agenda setting. For instance, the *Agenda for Change* presented goals for committees that committees did not set for themselves and did not reflect their actual plans. Assigning goals in a top down fashion does not build union strength or capacity. Then the dues increase was presented as all or nothing. The budget presented made it so that failure to adopt the increase would mean a severe gutting of committees making the actual implementation of the *Agenda for Change* unfeasible.

Overall, Ross' reflections focus almost exclusively on some of the intricacies of the long-standing debate on the relationship between various internal structures within the union. These are certainly issues of primary importance for the union, which cannot be ignored. However, there is another dimension to the project of union renewal beneath the surface of resolutions, budgets and action plans, which is not unrelated to the issues raised by Ross, but which often gets overlooked: the struggle to build an organized, independent activist base.

This effort is important because it confronts not only the internal structures of the union, but the very structure of labour re-

lations that limits union power today. Since the "postwar compromise" of the mid-1940s the labour movement has been plagued a disconnection between the leadership and the rank-and-file. In exchange for financial stability (automatic dues payments from members) and legal concessions which forced the bosses to recognize unions, the labour movement sacrificed its militancy. Within this new framework, problems in the workplace tend to be resolved by a professional layer of staffers, lawyers and arbitrators, rather than by the workers themselves through militant action. While this was a victory for the labour movement in many ways, we need to recognize that as a result rank-and-file members became disconnected from workplace struggles and from their unions, and their capacities to struggle have atrophied.

The question of the role of activists in a union with a progressive leadership must be approached with an eye to this broader context. Given the passivity and disconnection of union members today, the existence of an activist base cannot simply be assumed. Consequently, activists in a union, even one with a progressive leadership, must in the first instance apply themselves to the task of building such a base by politically re-skilling the membership. This has been one of the greatest achievements of Resolution 50. From this perspective, the actions of the activists in Ross' article take on a new significance. **R**

Union Activism and CUPE: A Further Reply

Stephanie Ross

In my analysis of CUPE Ontario's May Convention, I asked a serious question: in a union with a relatively progressive leadership, what role can and should a caucus of the Left play beyond claiming that "the plan doesn't go far enough"? Members of the Action Caucus conclude that my intention was to chastise them for being "a nuisance" to a leadership that has taken care of everything and to insist that they merely line up and clap appreciatively. Nothing could be further from the truth. Progressive leadership *needs* a mobilized and activist base, not just to keep them 'honest' and left-leaning, but also to legitimize in democratic terms their radical tendencies within and outside the union. What is at issue here is not a "difference of opinion about the role of activists in the union", but rather the *strategies* which activists should undertake to make the union more effective, democratic and militant. Action Caucus members and I share a desire for a

vibrant, membership-led, democratic and militant labour movement. But we diverge on the analysis needed to achieve this goal.

Action Caucus members are rightly concerned that I did not properly appreciate the impact of Resolution 50 on the internal life of the union through its mobilization of a new activist layer. The positive educational and capacity-building effects of this resolution were indeed visible, and caucus members' courageous and tireless efforts before and after the resolution's passage are a major contribution, which I perhaps underemphasized. The large numbers of young activists speaking at the microphones is also in part a testament to this valuable work. However, my point was to examine how this resolution was used by conservative forces within the union to support their own vision of CUPE as a depoliticized and locally-oriented collective bargaining machine to the detriment

of most of the membership's interests. While this group seemed to be smaller and more marginal than at previous conventions, it continues to have purchase amongst a significant minority of the local leadership (and perhaps more in the general membership) and effectively if opportunistically deploys deeply-held values about the link between autonomy and democracy. This group didn't have to convince a majority to block the financial basis for *Agenda for Change*: just over 33 percent was sufficient. Whether "unwitting" or not, the case against the dues increase from the Left bolstered, rather than marginalized, this position and did not engage with the substance of the plan.

It also did not offer an alternative vision of democratic politics within the union that would argue for the benefits of regionalization while insisting on the active facilitation of membership →

participation and control in these structures. Given the very difficult uphill battle required to extract more resources from CUPE National, *Agenda for Change* and all its latent potential for creating more effective and politicized collective bargaining and organizing structures, may be still-born. It will be those members in hard-to-organize sectors, who passionately demanded that the action plan be fully funded – and not the CUPE Ontario executive – who will suffer from the resulting lack of financial and institutional resources.

Action Caucus members seem less worried than I. They characterize the dues increase as a leadership attempt to make “short-term budgetary gain[s]” at the expense of building the union. They admit “some” members and activists were hurt by the failure to approve the full dues increase, but are not ultimately concerned: they are building the activist base necessary for any resolution or action plan to be implemented. The content of such plans is not especially important, and they do not offer an opinion on *Agenda for Change* itself or whether and how its elements might serve to strengthen grassroots activism. Nor do they focus on their fellow members’ very material interests in more effective bargaining structures or whether low wages might be a barrier to greater union activism. These goals must be subordinated to the conviction that *how* the union makes decisions is more important than *what* it decides.

The Action Caucus’s response to my focus on “the intricacies of the long-standing debate” in the union about structure seems to demote organizational history to an interesting yet irrelevant pursuit. However, as previous generations of CUPE activists will attest, union structure is *not* an esoteric question, but a central *strategic* one that needs careful attention. Attempts to (re)build an activist base – or to do *anything* in the union – take place within a concrete organizational context, with specific material and discursive resources, potential alliances, openings, and limits. Action plans need activists to carry them out, yes, but those activists also need more than force of will. *What* the union decides profoundly affects *whether and how* the members are able to mobilize and make claims within the union. To ignore this terrain, to

dismiss it as irrelevant to the project of union renewal, is, I fear, overly voluntarist and bends the stick too far in the other direction.

Action Caucus members also don’t offer an analysis of CUPE as such. Instead, their activity is framed as a response to the negative effects of the post-war compromise and institutionalized collective bargaining on unionism in general. Few on the Left would disagree that the legal frame-

“Activists also need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the terrain for socialist strategy than ‘leadership bad / grassroots good.’”

work has substituted bureaucratic procedure for membership action and contained much union militancy. But these insights are but a starting point, which tell us little about the variable ways that institutionalization was worked out in different organizations, and even less about how to intervene in actually existing unions. Surely it matters strategically that CUPE adopted a highly decentralized structure in order to prevent becoming like its more centralized private sector counterparts, both providing more room for independent grassroots initiatives (like Resolution 50) and creating important barriers to the initiatives that members themselves have desired?

Or that CUPE has always expressed a tendency towards more politicized collective bargaining, due not only to the connection between public sector workers’ economic interests and debates about public policy, taxes, and the relationship between citizens and state, but also to repeated attacks on its collective bargaining rights by successive governments? Or that, *despite* the strictures of the post-war compromise, CUPE has probably participated in more political and illegal strikes than any other Canadian union since the 1970s? Or that, unique in today’s labour movement, the Ontario leadership’s repeated calls for the union to use its National Defense Fund to finance – and thereby legitimize – just

such breaches of post-war “responsible unionism” might be a strategic resource? These all indicate a more complex internal political life that presents possibilities of alliance with both progressive leaders and those sections of the membership who experience bargaining as intensely political and who also grasp the contradictions between local autonomy and the effective implementation of democratic will at the provincial and national levels makes them open to a more radical vision.

Lest I be misunderstood, let me reemphasize: this is not a cheerleading exercise in support of the CUPE Ontario leadership. Like all unionists, they are contradictory. They should have taken a more active mobilizing approach when putting forward *Agenda for Change*, especially if they expect members to take ownership of the initiative and fight for it at National Convention in the fall. But it makes little sense to challenge leadership for its own sake. We must always assess when and how we “challenge the leadership openly” in terms of whether such interventions strengthen activist capacity. Activists also need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the terrain for socialist strategy than ‘leadership bad / grassroots good.’ Always casting leaders as mere bureaucrats out to increase their own institutional power base misses opportunities to support and deepen their more radical tendencies, which can then help to increase the space for ‘bold’ initiatives.

An abstract notion of democratic process that trumps other considerations risks derailing the structural changes that could support and amplify union renewal efforts. It may, as well, make the Left *appear* marginal to the majority of CUPE members and their concerns. Resolutions do not automatically guarantee action, and convictions alone do not guarantee a strategy. Both are ideas which become meaningful in concrete conditions. As socialists, we should aim to understand those conditions more clearly, in all their complexity and contradiction. **R**

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Supreme Court Shifts on Right to Bargain

Charles Smith

In June, the Supreme Court handed down its decision on the complaint by B.C. health care workers that the concessions and contracting out of jobs they suffered at the hands of the Liberal government in 2002 violated their rights under S. 2 (d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms on freedom of association. The Court's ruling upholding the union's complaint caught almost everybody by surprise. Previously, in a series of decisions in 1987 known as the 'labour trilogy,' the Court held that freedom of association rights only applied to individuals rather than collective organizations like unions.

Despite the legal defeats in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the unions were not dissuaded from going to court in order to protect the rights enshrined in the postwar regime of industrial legality. The reasoning behind this strategy is complex. While unions had always been hostile to judicial intervention in labour disputes (especially in its historical role of promoting the protection of private property with injunctions), this perception shifted when their social democratic allies proved incapable of protecting their long established political rights to bargain or to strike.

In 2001, the union movement received their first real victory under the Charter. In *Dunmore v. Ontario* the Supreme Court ruled that a government's decision (in this case the Conservative government of Mike Harris) to eliminate a segment of agricultural workers from protective union legislation violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court suggested that governments had a "positive" obligation to protect vulnerable workers in areas where it was impossible for individuals to organize.

Unions saw this as an important step forward. Thus, when British Columbia premier Gordon Campbell used his massive legislative majority to eliminate an existing contract with healthcare workers in 2002, the unions jumped on Dunmore's seemingly positive embrace of workers' freedom of association rights. The foundation of the health union's complaint rested on the claim that the BC government was eliminating their positive rights to bargain. In its decision on 8 June (*Health Services and Support – Facilities Subsector Bargaining Assn. v. British Columbia*) the court upheld this claim.

In a radical departure from the "labour trilogy," the court expanded the Dunmore precedent and concluded that s. 2 (d) of the Charter includes a procedural right to collective bargaining. The decision rested on three specific criteria. First, the court ruled that collective bargaining was not a statutory right created by legislation after World War II, but rather, was the culmination of two hundred years of labour struggle. This was a surprising admission from an institution that rarely considers social (or labour) history when making their decisions. Second, the court concluded that the Charter should be presumed to provide at least as much pro-

tection as international human rights documents to which Canada is a signatory. Finally, the court suggested that the expansion of workers freedom of association rights "reaffirms the dignity, personal autonomy, equality and democracy that are inherent in the Charter."

The labour movement and the left should rightfully see this as a victory. The court has now affirmed that workers have certain constitutionally protect rights that governments cannot simply legislate away. While the court was not asked to rule on the right to strike, the court's emphasis on "Charter values of equality and democracy" within the industrial relations field is certainly wide open. Indeed, the hospital union currently has disputes on the right to strike before the courts (which lost at the BC Supreme Court) but will likely be appealed in light of this decision. If the Supreme Court agrees to hear this appeal, the court will soon be asked to weigh in on the right to strike for political purposes.

To be sure, there are real limits to the decision. In concluding that the BC government's actions violated the Charter, the Court said that while governments have a duty to negotiate with unions, they do not have a duty to come to any sort of conclusion from those discussions. In other words, the actions of the BC government were unconstitutional because its actions ran roughshod over the duty to negotiate, not that it decided to contract out public services. Seemingly, if the government had "negotiated" – in a manner similar to the negotiations leading up the Ontario NDP's infamous Social Contract legislation in 1993-94 – then the court would have accepted these actions as constitutional. In this regard, the court seems to have left the door open for governments to continue to utilize back-to-work legislation in order to end public sector strikes, but can only do so after "good faith" negotiations. The court was not clear on defining the term "good faith," and thus left the door open for governments to engage in limited forms of bargaining before passing restrictive legislation.

Yet despite its legal limitations, this decision has important political consequences for workers. Danny Cavanagh, president of the Canadian Union of Public Employee's (CUPE) in Nova Scotia quickly jumped on the decision when he stated that the Supreme Court of Canada's "historic ruling" will put immediate pressure on Premier Rodney MacDonald government's plan to ban strikes in the health. Put more generally, the court's ruling provides the labour movement with an opportunity to broaden the popular meaning of democracy in a way that strengthens the working class in its struggles against capital and the state. They should be encouraged to use it as broadly as possible. **R**

Charles Smith teaches at Brock University and is a member of CUPE.

The Crisis in Manufacturing Jobs: Struggling for Answers

Labour Committee of Socialist Project

The last weeks of May have seen major demonstrations of workers' discontent with the crisis that has been unfolding in Canada's manufacturing sector. Some 52,000 jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector since January alone. The demonstrations were kicked off on May 23 by protests by the USW at nine plants, as part of its 'Jobs Worth Fighting For' campaign linked to the Ontario Federation of Labour. The USW actions included plant occupations, notably at Doormaker Masonite, which is shutting down its Mississauga plant to move its production to US facilities with the loss of 300 jobs.

In Windsor nearly 40,000 turned out on May 27 from unions and the wider community to protest the loss of manufacturing jobs and the economic crisis that has been besetting Windsor. The demonstration was led by the CAW locals, but also included support from other unions, such as CUPE, the teachers' unions, and the Chatham-Kent District Labour Council. The demonstrators marched on several Windsor streets and converged at the Ford Test Track. Remarkably, the demonstration was larger than the October 17, 1997 Days of Action area general strike against the neoliberal policies of the then provincial government of Mike Harris. The demonstration was followed by another in Oshawa the same day by General Motors workers and the local community.

And on May 30th, the Canadian Labour Congress and affiliated unions brought several thousand angry workers out to Parliament Hill as part of their 'Made in Canada Jobs' campaign (at http://canadianlabour.ca/index.php/made_in_canada_jobs). The CLC-led demonstration focused on the impacts of the high Canadian dollar – now at about 93 cents to the US dollar – and the impact of NAFTA and proposed trade deals with countries like South Korea.

Up to this point, there has been a near complete absence of either union or political action. What has unfolded is predominantly a series of union concessions, government subsidies, calls for opening East Asian markets for North American exports and demands for improved severance for laid-off workers. Both the provincial and federal governments have almost completely withdrawn from active industrial policies. They have focused on cutting wage, social and tax costs for capital, even further accelerating the rate of tax write-offs for new capital investment and expanding free trade agreements, including the project of deep integration with the US.

It is clear that the crisis in the Canadian manufacturing sector is intertwined with the larger neoliberal policies that have come to dominate politics and the impasse of the union and socialist movements. The protests by workers over the past weeks illustrate well the deep-seated frustrations. And they allow for wider debate about the campaigns and politics that will need to develop. These are, in our view, quite dependent on a sustained period of union renewal and the formation of new organizational and political capacities within the socialist movement.

* * *

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), spurred on by initiatives from the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), United Steelworkers (USW) and Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP), has moved to place Canada's devastating loss of manufacturing jobs on the national agenda. This initiative is significant for a number of reasons.

- To begin with, it asserts that the problem manufacturing workers face is more than cyclical; the problem will remain even if the economy 'strengthens'.
- In addition, the campaign extends to all of manufacturing, not just any particular sector, and so holds out the prospect – already too-long delayed – of building bridges across unions.

- And by looking to build strength in the community as well as the workplace, the campaign addresses a crucial mobilizing space which unions have so far not sufficiently or adequately addressed.

Judging from the CAW, where the campaign has, by spring 2007, been more developed, the enthusiastic membership response seems to have breathed some new life and hope into the union. It is clear that a good many local leaders, disheartened with the never-ending demands of concessions and frustrated with waiting for the next corporate threat or devastating announcement, have been anxious for such fightback campaigns.

But will the campaigns deliver? The most recent attacks on jobs and working conditions are not new; corporations and gov

ernments have, over the past three decades, radically stepped up their aggressiveness. Yet, no counter-response has to date emerged from Canadian unions to match that corporate radicalism. If we do not convincingly show that we are not going to keep taking this; if we do not lead a fundamental challenge to how the potential of our country is used; if we do not build a campaign broad enough and powerful enough to actually *compel* Canada's corporate and political elites into making concessions to *us* – then we should not be surprised that tomorrow offers only more of the same.

The issue of jobs, as well as the more general issue of what is happening to working people, will not be reversed without a much deeper rethink of the labour movement's vision and direction, structures and strategies. This pamphlet tries to contribute to that missing discussion. It begins with some background to the very useful information unions have been disseminating [see the websites of the respective unions]. We then turn to a discussion of alternatives. Ultimately, however, we have to supplement any alternative *policies* with an alternative *politics* – a new way of 'doing' that builds our collective capacity to understand, strategize, and act to place new options on the national agenda. Amongst other things, this will mean reinventing our unions.

Manufacturing in the Canadian Economy

1. The loss of manufacturing jobs is not just a Canadian problem

Over the last quarter century, capitalist development has meant a general shift from manufacturing jobs to service sector jobs. The actual number of manufacturing jobs fell in virtually every developed country – by 11% in Germany, 15% in Japan, 25% in the US and almost 50% in the UK. The one exception to this trend was actually Canada – though the increase in Canadian manufacturing jobs was very small (under 2%) and over the past few years it too has, as Canadian unions have emphasized, been falling dramatically.

MANUFACTURING JOBS IN DEVELOPED CAPITALIST COUNTRIES

CHANGE 1980–2006

CANADA	2%
GERMANY	-11%
ITALY	-11%
AUSTRALIA	-13%
JAPAN	-15%
USA	-25%
FRANCE	-31%
SWEDEN	-36%
UK.....	-47%

2. The manufacturing job loss is about more than trade

Trade is obviously a factor in the job loss. Over the last thirty years but especially since the early 1990s, the developing world – which was previously relegated to providing resources to the developed capitalist countries – has come to include a few large countries that are major manufacturers. The impact of this on our jobs should, however, not be exaggerated. About 85% of our imports still come from the *developed* countries rather than the developing ones. And in the crucial auto industry, the job loss is, increasingly, not a result of imports but the loss of market to companies like Toyota and Honda with factories increasingly located *here*. (This should, of course, not obscure the intensification of corporate attacks on workers' wages and conditions as international competition grows and corporate options spread).

3. More goods are being produced with fewer workers

The fact is that the real value of good produced in Canada – output in manufacturing adjusted to exclude the effect of inflation – is about double what it was a quarter century ago (this is also true in the US). But the rapid growth in productivity per worker (more technology, the restructuring of work, the old-fashioned but more sophisticated pressures for speed-up, and, to some extent, longer hours) has led to an increase in production without a corresponding growth in the number of workers.

China is the most stunning example of this effect of productivity and restructuring. In spite of its remarkable rise as a global manufacturer, the number of manufacturing jobs in China has actually fallen by some 15 million over the past decade – *more than the sum of manufacturing jobs lost by all the developed capitalist countries combined!* The explanation for this apparent paradox lies in China's shutting down of tens of thousands of small manufacturing plants in rural areas (the legacy of Mao's emphasis on local self-sufficiency) and concentrating them in larger, more 'efficient' operations. As well, China has privatized and 'rationalized' its former publicly-owned operations.

Should We Give Up On Manufacturing Jobs?

Of course not – the very fact that manufacturing jobs are scarcer than ever makes it all the more important to fight to keep what we still have. Manufacturing is so important in part because manufacturing jobs remain the best-paying jobs. As well, though only one Canadian job in seven is now in manufacturing, if we include manufacturing's spin-off jobs, the impact on the larger economy is much higher. And retaining a manufacturing capacity – the skills and knowledge to make things we need – is fundamental to also building any alternative society.

At the same time, we should not have any illusions about 'high tech' manufacturing necessarily implying more manufacturing jobs overall – as vital as this is to future productive capacities. The U.S. is the world's foremost high-tech producer, yet the share of manufacturing jobs in total jobs is even *lower* in the U.S. →

than it is in Canada (11.8% in the US versus 14.4% in Canada) – and the pressures there on the working class are even harsher than what workers face in Canada.

The on-going restructuring of industry means, moreover, that even when the total number of manufacturing jobs is not falling, individual jobs are still shifting from plant to plant, company to company, across sectors and across regions. It does not mean very much to tell a 50-year old steelworker in Hamilton that he may have lost his job but that Honda is hiring young workers in Alliston, or that a computer chip factory outside of Ottawa is looking for engineers, or that the Quebec aerospace industry is expanding.

The reality we confront is that:

- (a) Most of the manufacturing jobs that were lost aren't coming back;
- (b) Many current manufacturing workers will in the future be forced out of manufacturing into other sectors;
- (c) Even within manufacturing, its 'elite' status relative to other sectors is under attack.

The above points raise three sets of questions that have profound and inter-related implications for what manufacturing unions do and how they do it. They are worth summarizing before we turn to alternatives.

1. What kind of society do we want?

In defending ourselves we have traditionally focussed on protecting or expanding the *existing* structure of production. But when we look to the future, it is clear that demanding more of the same is not good enough, and not really desirable. We need to keep raising a prior and more basic question: What kind of society do we want and what does this imply for the kind of jobs we could and should be struggling to create?

2. Can we win if the working class remains so fragmented?

Unions are oriented to raising the standards of a particular group of workers. At best, this tended to ratchet up the standards of others. This seemed to work for a while, but it now dangerously isolates workers who did earlier move ahead. And it offers no long-term protection for the growing ranks of former manufacturing workers who have been 'dislocated' and have now moved into non-union service sector jobs or become unemployed. Stopping the decline in unionization is one answer, but it is not enough. Solidarity in raising the standards of *all* working people through the 'social wage' as expressed in universal health care, decent pensions, unemployment insurance, higher minimum wages and welfare rates, is increasingly the key to even hanging on to past gains. In self-defence as well as in the name of solidarity, the old strategy of moving ahead in the unionized sector and hoping this will set standards *for* others will have to give way to a new emphasis on setting standards *with and alongside* the rest of the work-

ing class in unorganized and precarious sectors of work and also those without work.

3. Are community struggles an add-on or fundamental to class struggles?

Unions have never ignored the community, but the site of struggle for unions has primarily been the workplace. This will always remain central to introducing workers to, and developing their confidence in, the possibilities of collective action. Yet, if working people are more than 'just workers' and have broader community and cultural interests, doesn't strengthening the relationship between the union and its members require substantially expanding the representation of workers' needs in the community? Is this not especially important as plants close and union members no longer have jobs – but remain in the community? And is this not all the more crucial as the extent of what we are up against demands a greater reliance on community allies?

It is clear there are no easy and comfortable solutions to what we face. But if the problems we face are large, we also have to consider bolder solutions, and ones that do not just cater to the corporations. A common contradiction is identifying the corporations as the source of our problems – and then putting forth 'solutions' that *strengthen* those same corporations and end up weakening unions and workers.

An Alternative Program

1. Fighting Plant Closures

In a society based on competition and the unilateral right of corporations to do what is best for them, plant closures are 'natural'. Our role, however, must be to challenge the legitimacy of



actions which, in taking away the tools and equipment we need, robs us of our productive potential and ability to meet our needs. Direct resistance in the form of plant takeovers – as both the CAW and USW have recently done – must become more common (even ‘natural’) if we expect politicians to take the loss of manufacturing jobs seriously.

Yet, even when workers do take plants over, they are usually limited to using it as a bargaining chip to defend or improve benefits. As important as this defensive measure is, we also need to develop a capacity to keep these plants in operation, including the capacity to convert them to some of the many products we currently import, or do not produce enough of, or those products we might need as environmental restructuring and other social changes occur.

2. Reducing Work-Time

The essence of unionism is negotiating the price and conditions of labour rather than the creation of the jobs themselves. But sharing existing work through reducing the hours of full-time workers has been a traditional union focus for the opening up of full-time jobs. It is rather ironic that with all the recent advances in technology and productivity, and with more family members in the workforce, hours of work for full-time workers have gone up rather than down and the issue of reduced work-time has largely faded from the agenda – except where it serves the corporate purposes of flexibility and the lower earnings and benefits of part-time work.

Reduced work-time is about more than new openings for some and leisure for others. It is also a condition for the mobilization needed to affect change; workers drained by overtime confront additional barriers to genuine participation. This concern was at the core of building the Canadian labour movement in the latter part of the 19th century. It can now contribute again to labour’s revival.



3. Developing Sectoral Strategies

We can not solve the jobs issue by addressing closures one at a time. We also need to develop longer term strategies for each sector. This might start with some of the proposals from earlier ‘industrial strategies’, such as a continental autopact to regulate the corporate commitment to jobs in each of Canada, the US and Mexico; a return to public ownership in aerospace; up-stream processing of resources in Northern mining communities and in the forestry sector; committing the billions governments spend on goods – from hospitals to furniture and office supplies – to greater local purchasing. But we also need forward looking strategies that reform public and industry planning capacities; establish public ownership, and end corporate subsidies without adding to public control; push ahead innovation capacities in key sectors of new value-added; and that guide the production of use-values for human needs – such as in housing, libraries, healthcare, parks and recreational facilities, public transport – apart from market criteria. All the planning for future production now takes place only in corporate bureaucracies, and not even in governments, and certainly not with the objective of developing workers’ control and input into production.

4. Incorporating ecological concerns and responsible production

Yet, as noted above, we will also have to take on creatively transforming what we do, not just defending what we did. This is where the ecological crisis comes in.

Responding to environmental concerns will be a dominant issue for the rest of this century. This goes beyond tighter standards in particular sectors; *everything will change*. Cities and transportation will be transformed, as will how our homes are heated and what kind of appliances we use. Some industries will fade while others will expand and new ones will emerge. For all the concerns about the environment threatening manufacturing jobs, all kinds of new products will be demanded by environmental-driven change – wind turbines and blades, solar panels, public transit equipment, new vehicle engines, reconfigured appliances, anti-pollution factory equipment, energy-saving motors and machinery, new materials for homes and offices. A serious job strategy would have to develop the capacities to provide these new products in an effort to move toward more ecologically-responsible production. And in such planning, we should not wait to see if Canada’s private sector will find this direction profitable. The need is clear, we have the potential to address it, and governments should directly create the public companies to bring those needs and potential together.

5. Linking Manufacturing and the Public Sector.

In the public sector, resisting privatization is not only a matter of job security and standards, but also a matter of confirming the advantages of goods and services provided on the basis of need, not profit (in terms of quality, value, access, and commitment to stay here). A credible public sector represents, therefore, →

both an ideological challenge to corporate 'logic' and a vehicle for addressing manufacturing jobs in a way quite distinct from the dominant bias in favour of private ownership to develop the Canadian economy. Canada's aerospace industry, for example, was developed and sustained through public ownership in the critical years when the private sector refused to do so.

But it is ultimately self-defeating to *automatically* define the public sector in itself as 'good'. Given the power of business and the dominance of capitalist values in our society, the public sector faces great pressure to become more commercialized and to operate, even without privatization, on private-sector lines. Unions must therefore lead the struggle for a particular kind of public sector. Working towards this would mean public sector workers identifying their most important allies as often also being their clients – as the Public Service Alliance (PSAC) did when some time ago it prepared pamphlets for the unemployed on receiving their rights when dealing with the government, or when the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) offered to deliver cheques to retirees during a strike against the post-office, or when Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Hydro workers led the campaign against privatization of our electricity). More generally, it means public sector workers and unions fighting for a greater responsibility in the management of a public sector that could establish itself as a more democratic and effective alternative to corporate control.

6. Linking Workers and Unions with Community Strategies

The issue of economic development has a regional as well as sectoral dimension. The focus in each community will differ – the response in Toronto will differ from that necessary in southern Ontario auto towns or in northern Ontario in mining or forestry communities. However, two common issues that would have to be taken on are: What kind of structure might effectively address the issue of manufacturing jobs or jobs to replace manufacturing? How will this be financed?

(a) Job Development Boards

The creation of local Job Development Boards would introduce a community planning capacity and guarantee (much as the right to basic schooling is now a taken-for-granted right) decent jobs for anyone willing to work, or the training leading to future work. These boards would include a research and engineering capacity and an educational component on economic literacy so people could more comfortably participate in the discussions. It would survey the community to establish needs and productive capacities; hold public forums to prioritize ideas and proposals; engage the community in discussions on local needs and possibilities; block corporate attempts to remove plant and equipment from the community and prepare conversion plans for the production of new goods; and develop plans to upgrade the community's economic and social infrastructure (transportation, clean water, sewage, environmental clean-up, schools, child care, services for the aged sports and culture) – much of which would also require local materials and equipment.

(b) Financing

If the federal government could so easily find the funds to send Canadian troops to support the American invasion of Afghanistan, why couldn't it find funds for socially useful projects at home? If governments can readily provide subsidies to corporations like Ford (which did not in fact protect Windsor's Ford engine facilities), why can they not provide funds for Windsor's broader economic and social development? If a developing country like Venezuela can take advantage of its oil riches to address inequality and development in its country and region, why can a developed country not use its own abundant oil wealth to do the same?

The federal government currently has a budgetary surplus that it is largely – and wrongly – committing to tax cuts favouring the rich. That surplus and a special levy on all financial institutions (banks, investment houses, and insurance companies) could support a federal Social Investment Fund to finance the Job Development Boards. The money exists; the point is to mobilize the political power to access it.

Would this also mean higher taxes on working families? It might. But we should not run from this possibility. Taxes – equitably distributed – are an essential and solidaristic tool to advancing our goals.

7. From competition to democratic planning

Meaningful democracy is about more than a form of government: democracy should also consider the form of *society* and social relations. It is in the economy that decisions are made about which goods and services are made, if we have jobs and investment, how the work is done, and who gets what. This obviously shapes our communities, choices, relationships – our lives. If the main elements of our economy are in a few private hands, and the basic decisions are dictated by their private profits, then – even if other important democratic rights exist – it is a pretty limited democracy that we live in.

The condition for moving on is that we place the issue of public control over investment, and democratic planning of the economy, on the agenda once again. It is only in that context that we can really start addressing the future in a way that does not condemn us to dependence on private corporations whose failure to deliver on a greater and more meaningful quality of life has already been demonstrated.

8. Ending NAFTA

If corporations are free to subvert workers and unions in workplaces by moving or threatening to move their production, then they will frustrate any attempt to do things differently. This is where taking on 'corporate freedoms' – which undermine *our* freedoms – becomes fundamental. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is not, as some argue, to blame for all our frustrations. But its explicit reduction of society to a collection of individuals connected by markets, and its ideological

and material endorsement of corporate rights and freedoms, stand as barriers to extending *our* rights and freedoms. Taking on NAFTA is fundamental to any program of change.

9. From alternative policies to alternative politics

The problem of course is not just identifying better policies but whether we can actually build the collective *power* to change things. Can we organize ourselves to overcome the bad ideas that have ruled our lives and start experimenting with new ideas that hold out some hope? What vision of society are we fighting *for* and how specifically might we *organize* ourselves to actually move closer to those goals? These are perhaps the most difficult issues of all. They are also the most important in the sense that without some answers – not necessarily ‘the’ answer, but at least some clear signposts – it will be near impossible to develop and reproduce the confidence to keep any campaign going, never mind extending it.

To many young activists, unions have become part of the problem, not the solution and they have focused their energy on building ‘social movements’. But however such movements might start, sustaining them will depend on the resources, organizational base, and strategic centrality of the one oppositional group that can do more than protest and in fact shut down production. The radical changes these movements demand will happen alongside unions or they will not happen at all. But if unions are to inspire this lesson, they will first have to transform themselves.

Rethinking Unions

1. Long-term visions are also needed

Unions, reflecting their members’ immediate needs, are biased towards the short-term. The point, however, is not that the short-term and long-term are in opposition; ignoring the longer-term means that we repeatedly face the same limited and demoralizing options capitalism puts before us. Including the longer-term is about expanding those options and getting a larger perspective on daily pressures.

The issue is therefore how to bridge the two: how does what we do today weaken or strengthen our capacity to fight tomorrow? How do we defend ourselves in terms of immediate concerns, while also building the kind of unions and social movements we so desperately need for broader changes?

2. Concessions and fighting for alternatives do not mix

It’s in this context that concessions – past gains given back to the corporations without a fight (or even sold by unions as ‘trade-offs’) – are so dangerous. Concessions implicitly teach the members, and suggest to the public, that it’s those past gains which are the cause of the problem, and so giving them up *becomes* the alternative and marginalizes discussions of other options. Moreover, once formal concessions are made in the collective agreement, management is in a position to further exploit this newly acknowledged weakness of the union through the *informal* mechanisms of aggressively attacking everyday working conditions and rights independent of what is or isn’t in the collective agreement. →

Community Responses: The Example of Windsor

Although Canada’s average unemployment rate is at historically low levels, in Windsor is over 10% (about 15% if we include those who have dropped out of the labour market over the past year), and things look to get worse. Auto jobs can and must be fought for, but everyone concedes that even in the best scenario, this will not solve Windsor’s jobs crisis. The option of trying to become a tourism and convention haven that caters to business and the rich (satirized in Michael Moore’s ‘Roger and Me’) has become a default position for many de-industrialized cities in crisis, but Windsor can set its sights higher.

An alternative for Windsor might best begin, as suggested earlier, by asking: What kind of community can we imagine in Windsor? What is it that people here need in terms of goods and services? What capacities do we have (skills, machinery, tools)? What would it take to put together these needs, capacities, and potentials?

It seems useful to start with needs that have already been identified. Like other cities, Windsor has a long backlog of postponed municipal projects: roads and buildings that need repair; sewage and water supplies that need upgrading; warnings that if electrical generation concerns are ignored black-outs will surely come; improvement and extension of public spaces like parks, the waterfront and sports facilities; service gaps in quality childcare and supports for an aging population.

As well, Windsor has one of the highest rates of cancer in North America and addressing this has, tragically, been largely set aside. Windsor in particular cries out for the kind of environmental/social/jobs agenda some have long advocated: linking industrial clean-up, strong environmental standards, waste management and the creation of green spaces to Windsor’s abundance of facilities, tools and skills which can be converted to manufacture the environmental products that the future will demand (e.g. solar panels and wind farms, energy-saving appliances, new building materials, the massive project of recycling cars, the extension of public transit). Letting Windsor suffer through a job crisis and the destruction of a community, when Windsor can become a model of what *could* be done, would be a crime.

The election of a ‘Windsor Job Development Board’, recognized by the municipality, might be the first step towards focussing on a plan to relieve the crisis in Windsor. Along with this, Windsor could demand that \$100 million be injected by the government to facilitate the creation of this Board and to introduce the emergency infrastructural jobs that Windsor, like other municipalities, has sitting on shelves awaiting some funding. That \$100 million would of course only represent a first instalment.

The result is that the confidence of workers in taking on their employer is derailed, and the union is left vulnerable – understandably – to membership ambivalence about the unions' very relevancy. So more than specific losses in benefits and rights are involved; the future capacity of the union to engage in struggles is also undermined.

3. Lobbying can never replace mobilizing workers and unions

Similarly, a strategy based primarily on asking politicians to do something for us, even one based on organizing the occasional petition or protest, will bring us very little immediately nor contribute to building our future strength. If we take our own rhetoric seriously – that we're facing something new and the threat is on a scale not seen before – then our response will have to match the scale of what we face, and to do so in novel ways. Of course we need to talk to politicians. But mobilizing, as opposed to lobbying, means concentrating on building our *base* and that even lobbying carries a weight beyond 'relationships' to corporations and politicians. It includes:

- providing the information and analysis local union leadership needs to get a handle on the issues with a level of confidence that encourages them to take that understanding to the members;
- engaging union activists and members in strategic discussions about what we must and can do;
- developing new cores of activists who are effectively organizers in the workplace and the community; and
- building the kind of collective capacity that can confront corporations and politicians with a measure of counter-power they can't ignore.

4. Are existing union structures adequate?

Unions have been involved in impressive struggles of late – the minimum wage campaign in which the Metro Toronto Labour Council was so prominent, the drive by UNITE-HERE for a master agreement in the hotel sector among its predominantly immigrant women membership, CUPE Ontario's courageous step beyond collective bargaining and domestic issues to raise the rights of Palestinians for national self-determination. But none of this has added up to something that holds out the promise of reversing recent trends. What kinds of changes within unions are necessary to get beyond this impasse?

- What would transforming our unions imply for how we allocate resources in the union (e.g. what the research and education departments do, the role of the staff beyond bargaining, how much is invested in movement-building)?
- What does it mean for how we relate to and activate union members (including the development of the skills and confidence essential for real participation)?

- What does union renewal suggest for how we interact with other unions and with the community, and to what we expect of labour councils and labour centrals?
- How would it affect how we approach organizing – is it about adding members or building the working class to become collectively more powerful?
- How would union renewal shape how we think about 'politics' and also help push us past the broader impasse of the left and the socialist movement?

5. Social class exists beyond unions

In their campaign on manufacturing jobs, the CAW has noted that it cannot overcome the crisis on its own and that broadening each union's base across unions, and across the various social groups active locally, is absolutely crucial. To that end, it has argued for holding social forums in each community. This is a welcome step. But if we see the problem as not just the latest crisis in manufacturing, but as our general lack of effective power, then it is important to be more ambitious and think about permanent institutions through which class issues can be addressed.

The social forums might, along these lines, be seen as the start of a permanent structure – the Windsor Assembly on Restructuring the Community (or WARC) for an example – for representatives of union locals and community groups to meet on a regular basis, elect an executive, plan campaigns, run educational sessions, establish committees where people with particular interests could focus on common projects, and link up with allies beyond the community (e.g. in a fight against NAFTA).

If successful, this would of course raise further issues such as developing and maintaining the core of activists necessary to keep any organization going, and more systematic coordination across communities. But these and other issues are part of the dynamics of building a new movement. The immediate question is whether there is enough concern, interest and commitment to take some immediate steps towards coming together with a serious intent to challenge where we have been and where we could go.

* * *

We have approached raising the above issues with a degree of modesty. The Canadian left does not have a clear set of 'do's' which, if the labour movement would only listen, would let us win the day. The left does, we think, have some relevant things to say, but the truth is that the impasse facing Canadian labour reflects the state of affairs throughout the developed world (and generally in the developing world as well). Our intent is therefore the more modest one of offering some hopefully constructive ideas, and contributing to an open discussion with labour activists about how we can move ahead. We need to rediscover – or perhaps discover for the first time – that, as Canadian author Michael Ondaatje has put it in his most recent novel, 'history is not only around us, but within us.' **R**

BUILDING DEMOCRATIC UNIONS IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA

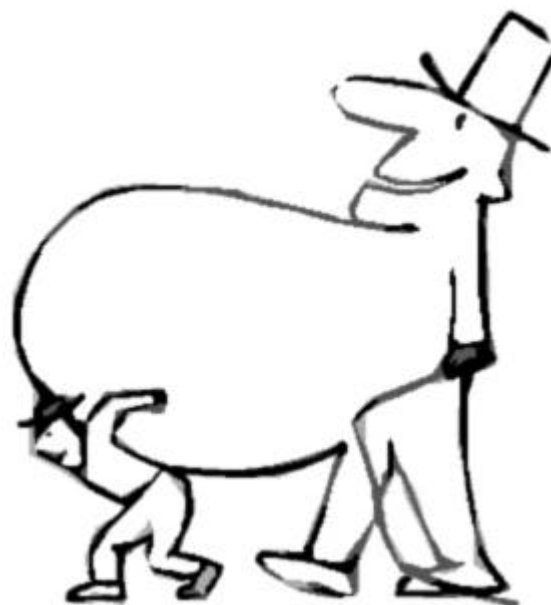
Herman Rosenfeld

I went on a two-week trip to the Russian Federation in May of this year, a guest of the School for Workers Democracy. The school is run by Boris and Galina Rakitsky (long-time Russian Marxist social scientists) and David Mandel, a Marxist political scientist, based in the University of Quebec at Montreal and a socialist activist in Montreal.

The school is a series of seminars organized in various parts of the Russian Federation, Belarus and Ukraine. It centres on two concerns: the struggle to rebuild the weakened labour movement, devastated by decades of domination by an authoritarian state and later, shock therapy privatization; and, the need to stimulate the development of socialist activists amongst the working class – ultimately contributing to the rebirth of the socialist movement there.

In Russia, the seminar participants are men and women workers involved in a new generation of unions that are democratic, militant and independent of management. Often, these unions are forced to compete with what they call “traditional” unions. The latter are the descendants of the official unions that were part of the state apparatus in the old corporatist soviet system. The traditional unions remain wedded to workplace management (many of whom still retain membership in those unions), support an ideology of “social partnership”, refuse to organize their members to fight for decent wages, benefits and working conditions and are bureaucratic and undemocratic. Often, the leaders of these unions use their office as a stepping stone directly into management for themselves.

The new unions face a number of challenges. The two kinds of union often co-exist in the same workplace and management works closely with the leaders of the traditional unions to threaten members of the independents (telling them they could lose their jobs, not paying the bonuses they are entitled to, etc.). The Russian labour code makes it difficult for them to organize and sustain themselves as organizations. In order to protect their members’ rights, they often have to resort to a cumbersome legal process that relies on government-sponsored courts. Finally, workers have very little experience with independent and democratic unionism and have only sporadic collective experiences with fighting together against the boss. The leaders too, are learning as they go. Building these unions very much involves transforming the working class in the process.



SEMINARS

The first seminar had 10 participants, all from the independent union at the Ford plant in St. Petersburg. That new plant has about 1,300 workers, roughly half of whom are members of the union. The union is militant, democratic and fiercely independent of management. It organized a strike (supported by many unions in the west) in February, which succeeded in winning a collective agreement. The union has also participated in larger campaigns to support workers in other independent unions in auto facilities in other parts of Russia. The traditional unions haven’t even tried to organize in Ford.

The participants were all rather young – the oldest was in his forties. There were two women. They were also very eager trade unionists, excited about building their union and looking for ways to deepen and expand their influence. This was a union that organized a small campaign to boycott General Motors, in solidarity with a struggle of workers at GM’s Togliatti facility when the company fired a fellow independent union activist there. The struggle succeeded and she was rehired.

The seminar was structured around a series of challenging questions dealing with working class political action. Boris introduced the session, divided up the class into smaller groups and assigned some of the very challenging questions. I sat in on some of the small group discussions with a translator and found varying levels of political development amongst the participants. For the most part, they engaged around the issue of the political choices facing workers, the state of the trade union movement and the attitudes and perspectives of co-workers. They skipped around some of the more politically abstract questions.

The report backs reflected a strong commitment to activism, the kind of trade union militancy that we see here amongst our best activists, and lack of experience with political projects →

and a relative unfamiliarity with their own political history. Unlike my previous experience in 1994, these workers had no illusions about how wonderful capitalism would be for them or Russia, but they had little notion about the possibility of an alternative system.

They had a great deal of scepticism about current political parties. Although they for the most part argued that the working class would need its own political party or parties, they had many differences about the ideology or structure of such institutions. There was a consensus on the need for extra-parliamentary political activism and the importance of developing sector-wide struggles and larger trade union structures (that is, for the independent labour movement.)

Boris used the whole class discussion to explain the evolution of classes in Russian society, and the kinds of political action that they usually engaged in. He had an extremely disarming and intimate style that the participants really loved.

In the discussion, I briefly talked about our experience with breaking away from the U.S. UAW and what were some of the lessons we learned from it. I also talked about some of the things that make capitalists do what they do, and why the working class and the labour movement have to understand and address them.

After the class, we attended an executive meeting of the Ford union, where they described some of the challenges they are now facing, such as the use of temporary workers by the employer and work intensification. I made a presentation to them about how unions in Canada challenge work intensity and the various strategies that unions use in the Europe and the west. I also spoke about various experiments – in Sweden, in particular – with alternative ways to organize work.

The next day there was a different group of seminar participants, from a selection of workplaces from across the city, including the post office, Ford and other factories. Rakitsky began the session with an extensive presentation about Russian working class political experience going back to the Bolshevik period. After he finished, participants again divided into groups, but the questions differed from the previous day. They dealt with how wages were paid, what components were guaranteed and what were based upon performance and bonuses.

Participants reported that at most, the base wage was 2/3 of their total pay. The rest was paid by bonuses, often at the discretion of the employer. Many of the bonuses depended on individual agreements made with a supervisor that could also be overruled by higher management.

Bonuses covered such elements as seniority, “professional mastery”, attendance, collective output norms (for the work brigade), and others. The Ford plant had over 85% guaranteed with supplements for night work and dangerous job assignments. Some described workplaces that had less than 20% of the wage guaranteed. State minimum wage levels are 10%

of the average wage. In soviet times, 50% of wages were dependent upon bonuses.

Boris noted that the Russian state has backed away from regulating wage levels and is committed to a low wage strategy, hoping to attract investors that way. This began with the shock therapy period in the early 1990’s.

The group talked about the necessity of creating a union movement that would be capable of eliminating the dependence on managerial whims to determine worker pay.

TOGLIATTI

After returning to Moscow, we prepared for two seminars in Togliatti – 1,000 kilometres southeast of the Russian capital. That city, named after the Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti, was built around an auto assembly and parts complex producing Lada cars. The company is called AutoVaz. Over 120,000 people work at the complex, covering all phases of auto production and administration.

The traditional union at AutoVaz is huge, extremely corrupt and compromised by its integration with management. With the end of the soviet period, the union “inherited” the mass membership base. Given its ineffectiveness and refusal to defend the independent interests of the workers, it has lost members.

The independent union called “Edinstvo” (Russian for *solidarity*), was created in a series of mass struggles in the 1990’s, surviving in the face of the combined opposition of management and the traditional union. It has about 1,000 active members today at AutoVaz. GM also has a joint venture with Autovaz with about 1,300 workers. The independent union there has about 100 members.

The first seminar asked participants to do three basic things: they calculated what the costs of normal living expenses would be on a monthly basis for a family of four – living at a decent level of existence and compared these costs with their present wage levels. Next, they were asked to think about ways to fight for higher individual and social incomes in the plant level and on the level of the sector, region and the country. Finally, they thought about how Russia’s entry into the WTO might affect their ability to earn an income that could provide an adequate standard of living. The participants were mostly from the GM plant, with some participation from AutoVaz.

When the participants considered the first set of questions, they came up with a set of costs that went far beyond their current wages and social benefits. The discussion was very lively. Galina wrote two charts on flip the front board, showing the relative shares of GDP that go to wages and profits in Russia and elsewhere. She compared social transfers and tax rates.

After lunch, the groups consider how to build a movement to close the gap between wages and costs. Almost all the participants called for creating an alliance between alternative unions in

auto plants, like Ford and AutoVaz, working towards common collective agreements and developing sectoral strategies. They also argued for building a movement to change the labour laws.

I intervened and told the group about how the industrial union movement was built in the 1930s and '40s in Canada and the USA.

The following day, the seminar had over 26 participants, mostly from Edinstvo. The session began with a general discussion about the likely effects of globalization and Russia's accession to the WTO. Participants noted that people today are more reticent to strike or fight for higher wages. The traditional union accepts this and defends the situation from the point of view of the management. Workers at AutoVaz (and workers that have jobs in large multinational corporations) consider themselves lucky to have relatively secure and relatively well-paid jobs.

Workers know that the technological level at AutoVaz is trailing that of the multinationals and that the quality of the vehicles and parts is also lagging behind. They look for foreign investment from one of the U.S. or Japanese multinationals, but realize that it will mean an overall reduction in jobs and eventually larger changes to the highly concentrated production facility at AutoVaz.

As well, participants noted that co-workers are not all that willing to fight back these days. They seem to be "waiting for someone else to take the lead."

After this discussion, the seminar was divided into groups, answering questions on how they are paid (similar to the second day of the St. Petersburg seminar). I explained the principles behind the way workers are paid in Canadian auto plants, emphasizing the CAW's traditional opposition to forms of contingent pay.

After the session ended, Mandel, Galina and I were invited to the Edinstvo general meeting. It was clear from the discussion that Edinstvo had fought to establish a role for genuine trade unionism inside AutoVaz, but also in the community. The union was involved in numerous court cases regarding people's rights on the job. There is a growing co-operation with other independent unions, particularly in the auto sector. Edinstvo played an important role in defending the job of the fired (but later rehired) union activist at GM in Togliatti. They helped the Ford St. Petersburg union fight against excessively hot weather in the Paint Shop there. The union also helped the transport workers (those who transport parts and finished vehicles around the city) to unionize.

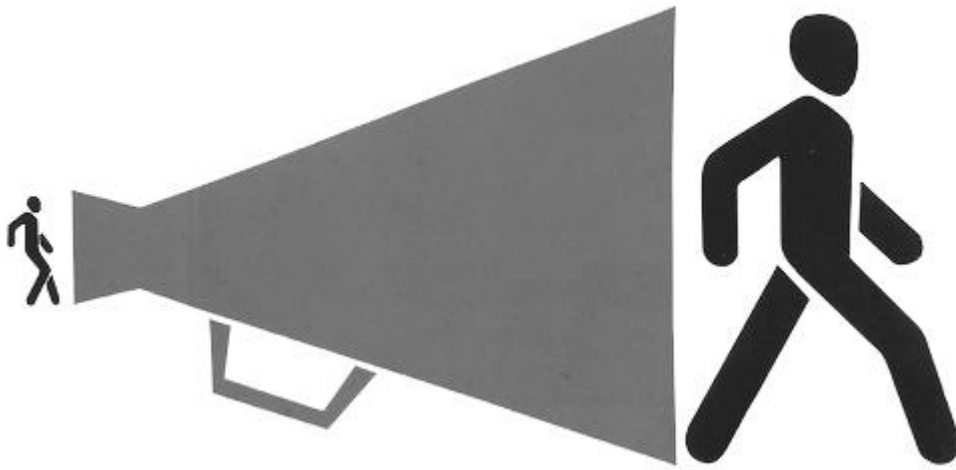
OVERALL COMMENTS

It is clear that the Russian labour movement is in a rebuilding stage. On the political front, there are no real socialist political parties or movements. The traditional unions support the political movements arrayed around Putin. Many people in Russia are very cynical about this, but the lure of being in the Duma, getting the perks (there are lots) and basking in an alliance with a powerful and popular president difficult to pass up for some.



Mandel and the Rakitskys see their role as helping to develop the independent unions and stimulating the growth of socialist ideas and approaches amongst active workers. The School for Workers Democracy is an excellent tool for developing this work. There are also plans for a Workers University, so that those that wish to deepen their understanding of social science in Russia can do so. It is currently in the works. **R**

Herman Rosenfeld is a union activist in Toronto.



Media Matters:

a call to action at the “20 Years of Propaganda” conference

Nicole Cohen

In 1988, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s book *Manufacturing Consent: a Political Economy of Mass Media* was published. This influential book, widely read by academics, activists and media critics, proposed that ruling class biases in the media resulted from five “filters” - ownership, advertising, a reliance on “expert” sources, negative feedback, and anti-communist ideology. These five filters shaped the way in which news is presented. “The raw material of news must pass through successive filters, leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print” wrote Herman and Chomsky. The propaganda model attempted to explain how the five aforementioned filters predispose the elite media to the legitimization of corporate and state interests, the marginalization of public dissent, the disciplining of journalists, and the propagation of a pro-business ideology.

The propaganda model was recently re-visited at a conference titled “20 Years of Propaganda?” held at the University of Windsor (May 15-May 17, 2007). Organized by Paul Boin (chair of the University of Windsor’s communication and social justice program) to mark *Manufacturing Consent*’s 20th anniversary, the conference brought 300 people together to discuss the relevance of Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model for understanding the current media terrain. Conference participants discussed everything from the media’s role in supporting the U.S. occupation of Iraq to the effects of media concentration to the marketization of the internet to the need for Canadians to mobilize around media policy issues.

The conference was especially relevant and timely for Canadians. Canada has the highest concentration of media ownership in the industrialized world. Furthermore, on the conference’s final day, the CRTC – Canada’s broadcast regulator - announced it was removing hourly restrictions on the number of advertising minutes broadcasters are allowed to air. This made the conference’s call to action even more pressing. “Important work has to be done” stated Amy Goodman, host of *Democracy Now!*, in her keynote address. Goodman emphasized the important role that independent media plays in representing grassroots struggles. Goodman commented on how despite 24-hour news channels and communications technology that keeps some of us connected to the glo-

bal information flow around the clock, most of the media produces and circulates disinformation or “static.”

Many of the conference participants discussed the mainstream media’s complicity and duplicity in covering (or not covering) occupation and conflict, particularly in Haiti, Afghanistan and Iraq. In Iraq, “the media reached a new low in accommodating US policy,” said Herman, who fielded questions about the propaganda model with Chomsky. Herman argued that the propaganda model is more powerful than ever due to the concentration of the media and the media’s increasing integration with the state. States have become much more sophisticated at bullying and managing the media. The media, in turn, make larger concessions to the state out of fear of not being given access to its information.

Both Herman and Chomsky acknowledged that new and democratic media struggles have emerged online to challenge the propaganda model since they wrote *Manufacturing Consent*. A major battle is now being fought over the future of the internet. “Net neutrality” or the sustaining of open access to the internet is a major concern. Telecommunication companies are lobbying to create a two-tiered internet system wherein network providers would privilege access to certain sites and block access to others. Goodman urged conference participants to engage in struggles to stop the corporate attempt to create a two-tiered internet system. The internet, despite its limitations, is a major democratic means for horizontal communication and grassroots organizing.

New communication technology (including the internet), however, was considered as the sixth filter of the propaganda model. New communication technology not only changes how the media is publicly accessed, but also, shapes the way in which information is produced, retrieved, and circulated. Communications technologies have enabled lean newsroom production practices, altered news work routines, and facilitated massive job cuts. Technological convergence has enabled the integration of broadcast, print and online journalism, which this has resulted in the homogenization of content. Thomas Baggerman, a media studies professor in Columbus, Ohio, detailed how new technological developments – such as robotic cameras and fully-automated studios –

allow television chains to centralize operations and run the same “local” news broadcasts on channels across the country.

Other conference participants discussed the media’s poor coverage of domestic issues, the professionalization of journalism, and the democratic potentials and limitations of the internet. An interesting perspective was presented by University of Western Ontario professors Nick Dyer-Witheford and James Compton. They argued that the propaganda model as a source of disinformation may not even be necessary in a world where people’s “reasoned fear” of a vast material redistribution of resources holds the status quo firmly in place.

Overall, the conference was an important reminder that social transformation is related to media transformation. As filmmaker and media critic Danny Schechter passionately argued, the media is “stealing our imagination, our right to a democracy... that’s a crime and we have to fight back.” When asked about “what’s to be done?”, Chomsky replied that activists must organize for change through diverse social movements.

The conference thus served as a call to action. An independent, alternative and radical media that can give voice to the marginalized and hold the mainstream media accountable is needed. In Canada, large-scale activism on the terrain of the media is crucial. Canadians can learn from the vibrant media reform movement in the U.S. (www.freepress.net).

On the conference’s final day, a brief political strategy meeting was held. The outcome was a proposal to form a Canadian media activist/reform movement to work on policy and net neutrality issues, support the work of grassroots media and make international links with other media activists. Email lists have been generated, meetings held in Toronto, and a website (unrelated to the conference) has been established at www.mediareform.ca. Conference organizer Paul Boin will be updating the conference website (www.uwindsor.ca/propaganda) as a way to facilitate and continue dialogue about media struggles.

A media initiative of this scale faces many challenges including funding, inclusiveness (of gender, race and class issues, as well as local-level groups) and even organizational coherence. But a commitment to act for social change has been made, which is an important first step. Herman and Chomsky argue that the mass media is a system of control over information and a tool of class rule. While this may be true, it is critical to also see the media as a site of struggle for social justice. As John Downing, scholar and author of *Radical Media*, put it at the conference, “the media are not only the enemy, but also the battlefield.” **R**

Nicole Cohen is a PhD student in communication and culture at York University.

Black and Proud or Colonial Mentality?

James Brown, Fela Kuti and the limits of Black Power

Toby Leon Moorsom

While there is reason to feel unease about the misogynist and contradictory politics of the late James Brown, it is a mistake to underestimate his significance as a figure in a long struggle for liberation. To truly appreciate Brown we need to situate him in the context of the radical Pan-Africanist thought that born out of key social struggles in the 1960s. These struggles posed a serious challenge to the global capitalist system, but unfortunately petered out by the latter half of the 1970s when a global ruling class devised a new strategy of disciplining the poor and marginalized into submission.

In the late ‘60s there was a convergence of social movements in the industrialized countries at the same time colonized peoples in the Southern hemisphere were fighting liberation struggles. Before the 1960s radical social movements had fought against poverty and horrendous working conditions, however the issue for many black people around the world was that capitalism didn’t even provide an opportunity for them to sell their labour power. If black people did work, post-slavery, it was for much lower wages.

Organized labour in the industrialized countries, domesticated by the post-war Keynesian compromise, also participated in this racist exclusion by denying membership to black people and neglecting to organize in industries dominated by black labour.

Although many African countries have important legacies of industrial working-class struggle, Africans in the diaspora were more likely to discuss emancipation in church congregations than in union halls. As many were deprived of formal state education, ideas were often communicated in music rather than written word. In many parts of Africa drums were important in ceremony partly because they communicated to people in distant villages important matters such as a death or wedding. Syncopated rhythms that inject hard high notes when deep downbeats are expected are common to almost all African rituals in which participants are understood to become possessed by spirits.

James Brown is often credited with causing a major shift in musical forms in West Africa throughout the late 60s and early

70s where forms such as ju ju and highlife became radically disconnected from structures of authority. In ju ju, for example, songs are commonly constructed in praise of prominent men that in return provide payment to musicians. Highlife is a mix of jazz and more “traditional” forms of West African music that was played in the spare time of musicians who made their living playing big band for white colonials.* It was called “highlife” part in mockery of the wealthy, but also partly in an understandable desire among Africans to have access to some of the wealth and extravagance they saw colonials living from the profits of African land and labour.

In 1968 and 1970 James Brown made trips to West Africa, while the soon-to-be-famous Nigerian, Fela Ransome Kuti (later to become Fela Anikulaputi Kuti) went to the USA in 1969 where he met Brown, recorded in LA and socialized with members of the Black Panther party. Some accounts say Fela made the musical transformation from Highlife to “afrobeat” following this trip. Others claim Brown and his band had been surreptitiously recording Fela’s music to study and emulate. Far before Brown had visited Africa, however, prominent African musicians had been studying in Europe and North America. Although record companies were generally uninterested in African music, many of these musicians had bands and played with prominent Jazz artists that cite Brown as an influence - thus there was much more cultural exchange between Africa and the Americas than common histories tend to portray.

The Parallel Move to Funk and Afrobeat

There are two essential features of both afrobeat and funk. The first are syncopated rhythms (“up for the down stroke”), while using horns, guitars and keyboards to create interlocking poly-rhythms rather than melodies. The second element is explicitly

* The term ‘traditional’ is very problematic in African history as it creates a false impression that societies were isolated and culturally stagnant. In reality, African societies have been subject to more change over the past 10,000 years than any others. This is the result of both environmental and geopolitical reasons. The Atlantic slave trade and colonial imperialism has made the past 500 years the most tumultuous.

political lyrics offering critical analysis of systemic power, railing against poverty and mocking figures of authority while drawing on movements for black power and Pan-Africanism. Much of the extraordinary power of James Brown and Fela Kuti alike came from the fact they appropriated symbolism and ritual from the church. Fela played in his club “the Shrine”, where the organ occupied the centre of attention and the audience was encouraged to dance as syncopated rhythms help them exorcise the “colonial mentality” that possessed them. By the late ‘60s Africans were seeing independence administrations overthrown in military coups

and those advocating a radical Pan-Africanism were marginalized. In the absence of liberal democratic rights, musicians had more space to express political opposition than most. The same was true within the US, where black activists were being gunned down and non-violent marches were met with severe police repression.

There can be no doubt that afrobeat and funk were politically radical. Brown and Fela emphasized the common person as an intellectual, suggesting it took “mind power” to survive in abject poverty – to know how to feed, cloth and house your

children when you didn’t even have a job. Fela encouraged people not to fear the military, who he described as Zombies - hollow bodies merely filling cloth uniforms. He challenged racism, describing Africa as the centre of the world, correctly noting that it had the longest human history of any continent and he encouraged people to give up their obsessions with whiteness and the material wealth associated with the West. Brown of course urged people to be “black and proud” and saw the need for “the big payback” to those suffering from the legacies of slavery. He called businessmen and politicians “backstabbin hustlers” and preached an ethic of sharing where people should “take some, but leave some”.

Fela described foreign businessmen and local politicians as “International Thieves”, and encouraged people to organize a “Movement of the People” against them. He offered a sophisticated analysis of the post-colonial state, providing tools to help people understand and overcome “tribal” divisions and oppose the corruption fueled by international corporations. He popularized ideas of radical figures like Franz Fanon and Walter Rodney, yet had no patience for theory disconnected from social struggle. Along with this, the legacy of gospel and soul



in Brown and Fela's music brought a great degree of empathy for poor people, allowing them to recognize how hard it is to be righteous in a world that pits poor people against each other.

While both Brown and Fela have reputations as misogynists it is too simplistic to suggest they completely lacked a feminist analysis. Brown was arrested numerous times for wife-abuse and Fela Kuti married 27 women at once, yet many of their actions also reveal a great degree of respect for women's political activism, each of them giving prominent space to female musicians in their work. One of Fela's first afrobeat songs was co-written and sung by Black Panther member Sandra Isadore. In 1966 Brown made it clear he was at least aware of problems with the patriarchal nature of American society, recording "It's a Man's Man's Man's World", co-written with Betty Newsome, drawing from the title of the film "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World". He also used his production company to help his outspoken band member, Marva Whitney make records. The limits of feminism in funk and soul however comes primarily from the fact the message was often merely for men to learn to "treat women right" (i.e. like a "lady") rather than see them as equal, intelligent human beings who perform the majority of the world's labour.

While funk and afrobeat musicians were re-appropriating notions of "Africanness" and "blackness", they also tended to fall into essentialisms and false representations based on white stereotypes. Fela Kuti, for example, made an attempt to run for president wearing only a pair of underwear and his album covers commonly depicted a "Movement of the People" in loin cloths, wielding spears against businessmen in suits and jewels. In the early '70s Brown also invoked these notions of Africa in more obscure tracks that were predominantly hand drums and incomprehensible grunting. While this re-appropriation is important in opposing racist, repressive and consumption driven values imposed by colonialism, it had the effect of misrepresenting the continent and overlooking the fact Africans had many centuries of engaging with the "West" in rather different terms.

The greatest limitation of funk music ultimately led to a decline in its significance and points to a serious tension in strategies of Black liberation. This weakness comes from the fact Brown was becoming a black capitalist and caving to the demands of mass marketing. Many North Americans have been impressed by the Black Nationalist, Marcus Garvey, who felt African Americans would only be capable of improving their material conditions if they started their own capitalist industries and promoted consumer loyalty in building an alternate empire. His ideas were seriously challenged by figures like W.E.B. Du Bois and Walter Rodney who suggested the position of Africans was a consequence of capitalism and that a more thorough challenge to the system and its related social hierarchies would be necessary. Fanon's criticism of the national liberation struggles was that while they were broadly supported, they were insufficiently deep. People were willing to riot and strike, but they neglected to extend the challenge to *all* social hierarchies and organize for sustained resistance. This statement would also be true of the funk experience.

Brown was a horrendous employer and underappreciated the

talents of his band members. George Clinton, Fred Wesley and Maceo Parker had all left the JB's by the mid-seventies and took funk into territory beyond what Brown was capable of on his own. Along with alienating the JB's, Brown became increasingly politically conservative, to the point of playing for Nixon's presidential campaign. His music failed to maintain its pre-1975 relevance and funk succumbed to the politically lighter and more musically mainstream disco.

Fela Kuti offers an interesting contrast to Brown because he refused to yield to commercial pressures – though may have been incapable of doing so given the economic conditions in Nigeria. Nigerian academic Sola Olorunyomi argues that Fela refused to cater to the desires of mass culture to become a commercial superstar as Brown did. He frustrated record company executives by rarely playing a song after it was recorded. Moreover, songs were between 10 and 30 minutes long. The result was that he was always challenged to provide fresh analysis, but also that he was extremely difficult to market among radio and concert audiences – especially in the U.S. where people wanted to know the songs before they paid for a ticket. Fela would also challenge audience members who requested songs and argued with them about politics before playing a newer piece to further his point. Fela died in 1987 and more than a million people went into the streets as his coffin was marched across town.

In spite of his declining relevance, Brown's infectious rhythms do of course live on as oppositional music in hip hop. This occurred as poor inner city youth, lacking the money for instruments would rhyme over the drum breaks – thus the term "break dancing" which became popular in the death throes of disco. The fact that hip hop is today now succumbing to the effects of commercialism suggests that in capitalist societies oppositional music can never stand in place of social struggle.

As an aspect of our language ability, music can be progressive or reactionary. What is important about the syncopated rhythms of funk is that they allowed people to shake themselves out of conformity. Capitalist society tends to restrict people's movement to the confines of production. That is, to repetitive and mundane actions. Oppression and exploitation are sensuous human activities so it makes sense that moving our bodies in directions and rhythms not defined by the demands of capitalist production can be one aspect of culturally challenging oppression and exploitation. **R**

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The Political Poet, Al Purdy

Joe Rosenblatt

I was to go on to commit an unpardonable offense, a *lèse majesté*. As those sexy worker bees hummed and worked their way into the hive of my mischievous mind, spurred on by that senior poet's political stance in his defence of the Cuban Revolution, particularly as it affected his muse, I carelessly made a sweeping judgmental statement – one that goaded Al so strongly that it was as if I had shaken all the apples off his United Empire Loyalist family.

In an interview published in an obscure literary quarterly that he had somehow managed to acquire (he was a serious collector of Canadian books and periodicals), I had obliquely referred to him as a “political poet.” He protested this rude designation of his genre of poetry. It was almost as though I had uttered an ethnic slur against the sturdy descendants of pioneer Loyalists in the farming region of Ameliasburg, which his best poetry celebrated.

But I had offended him and there was no turning back. I had to foolishly defend my remark. I countered that he had, after all, written a beautiful elegy on Che Guevara, that martyred Christ figure of the international Socialist Revolution, mythologized by the New Left after the dishevelled and shoeless Che and his insurgent group were captured in a hinterland guerrilla camp in the jungles of Bolivia. Lauding his poem, which focused on a salient image of the five fingers of his folk hero's severed hand (lopped off by a Green Beret-trained counter-insurgency militiaman to positively identify this ace-rebel by his fingerprints) did not cool his petulance, nor did my goading him that The Great One was surely betrayed by the very oppressed peasants he wished to liberate. I stubbornly defended my position, although with hindsight I realize it was oversimplified. It was true that he was writing political poems, just as his muse dictated, but it would have been more appropriate to say that in the main he was committed to writing social poetry.

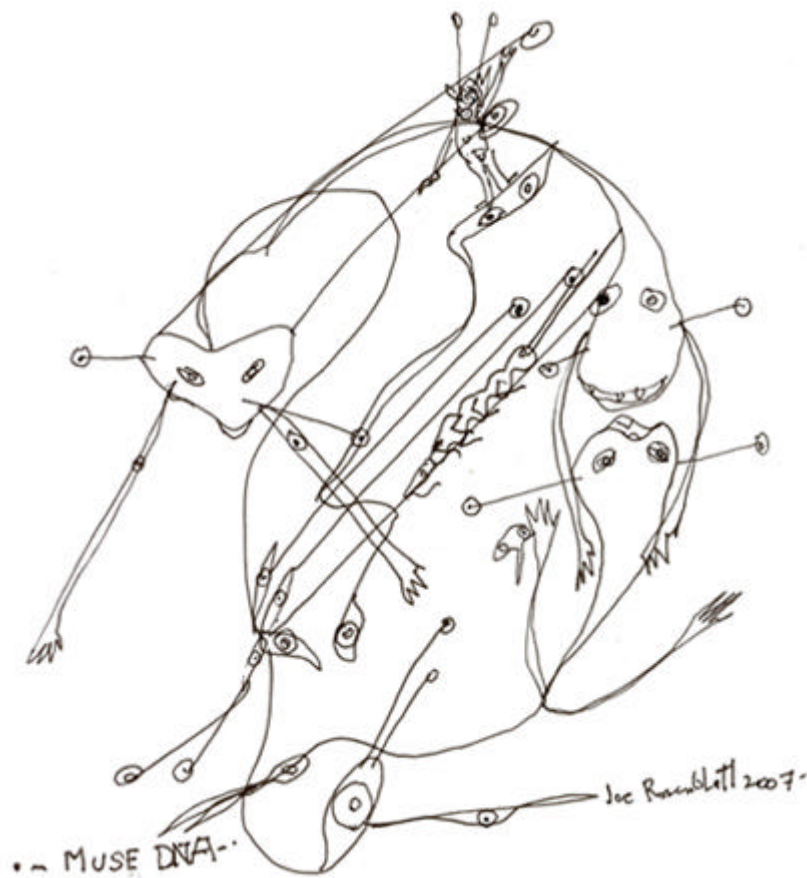
Disdaining poems that were tainted with *agitprop*, or harboured swarming propagandistic blowflies, I could accept a politically oriented poem if it was well crafted and the Muse wasn't cheapened by the blatant following of a party line. I would not have Lady Muse become a didactic whore to serve the masses and their self-righteous, usually self-proclaimed messiahs, whom I loathed – recalling Evelyn Waugh's terse dictum that “it was a curious thing . . . that every creed promises a paradise which will be absolutely uninhabitable for anyone of civilized taste.”

The Muse for me was unadulterated oxygen and freedom combined. I would not share this soul-food, personified in the

essence of The Virgin Muse, with those well-intentioned comrades and other assorted tyrants-in-the-mould who were turned on by the teachings of the social engineers, Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. Prostitute the Muse, to help create what I expected would be future dystopias, deformed worker states and other twisted, greater asylums, worse by far than those institutions of exploitation and repressive state apparatus in the capitalist democracies? Never! I would rather have betrayed my class, gone along with the democratic bourgeoisie and their means of production, than support a social experiment gone as rotten as blight on a potato, or a penetrating mite on the surface of a bee. History had shown that worker idealists in the vanguard of social revolution changed when they got a whiff of state power. I could even see among the camaraderie who the perfect autocrat would be. Sad to say, but my self-righteous class were natural tyrants. The Little Man couldn't be entrusted with state power, a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” let alone poetry, especially a free-spirited metaphysical muse.

There where others like me around the socialist movement who required those private breathing holes under the ice of society to survive. There was no room for a mystic influenced, or rather nourished, by obscurantist petit-bourgeois junk food. But I belonged to the junk food sub-human echelon, for poetry at the most vogueish of times is an indulgence, a toy of sorts, used by heartbroken sots of both genders for psychotherapy as well as those in between the societally approved Official Sexes. I was a non-commodity in a value-driven society, as for example, remembering to send some Valentine verse along the line: *roses are red . . .*

Was I then being reactionary in ignoring human suffering? I suggested that pamphlets and common tracts were more appropriate instruments for social change – if one was in earnest – than writing a poem that would be forgotten when that cause was no longer in view. My poems were anodynes, pain-killers, or escapist opiates. I preferred to dissolve a little fantasy moon in my poem, and ingest the mystery and for a time forget the brutality of the Real World. I made a common cause with those throughout the sixties who took psychedelic drugs to “stamp out reality,” writing internal poems on fauna – social insects and cats in imaginary gardens. I was a closet mystic, unable to write acceptable poems that would resonate with my contemporaries, poems of relevance – or would it be marginalized metaphysical writings? Poetry was a sublime art form, but who were the beneath-the-surface readers, the *serious* poem-tasters? Did they carry a union card? Political poetry, social realism, socialist realism, all three were joined at the navel by an umbilical cord of secular fundamentalism.



Was it a mere coincidence that Al knew Ross Dowson, a professional revolutionary socialist, and my first mentor, and a father-figure to me and others in their twenties at an impressionable age where young minds could be moulded to serve the people? This was where I would earn my knowledge degree – in that College of Hard Knocks. “Trotskyists,” Ross would tell me with a mischievous smile, “are the Jesuits of the Socialist Revolution, and don’t you forget it.” I was good cadre material.

Now this is not to imply that Al was remotely a secular fundamentalist, a hard-nosed socialist, a chattering Marxist parrot – he wasn’t, and it was against his nature to follow orders. When confronted by an arrogant and impolite individual, his stock phrase would be “Go piss up a tree.” Such individuals as Al, on the periphery, could never be associated with The Fourth International. He definitely wasn’t Party material.

Very early on, we silently agreed to disagree. His poems were rooted firmly in hyper-reality, even as he travelled the globe exploring new subject matter for his poems. Thematically he dealt with humankind, formed portraits of individuals who ranged from hockey stars to politicians and poets. They worked for him, triggered that subliminal response that might loosely be called inspiration – a word I would never use in his towering presence, a word he frowned upon. There were too many wannabe poets – poets our mutual friend Milton Acorn referred contemptuously as “the middle class in proletarian blackface,” as he blew smoke from a cheap petrified cigar. And Al wasn’t going to refute that. Mention inspiration and his own, equally

cheap, half-lit cigar combusted with puffy testiness as he chewed over the word, masticating it as he would a sirloin.

Inspiration became a *verboten* term, like incest. It would be fair to say that Acorn was not allergic to the word, for prophets and messianic poets scarcely are, not if you’re going to receive The Word from the Almighty. However, once I had a few hits of Al’s fermented grape juice, malice parted my lips and I became a mischievous imp. He was easy to goad, whether one did it by conscious design or a thoughtless stream of consciousness, an utterance against the toilers. I felt naughty being a traitor to my class, a class I always wanted to escape.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that inspiration was always there, self-evident as oxygen, one could not mention inspiration by word. His muse inspirationally worked the societal zoo, and did it globally: whether it was in Cuba, Easter Island or the Canadian Far North, there was a zoo of humanity, just as I had a preserve, or poetic zoo selectively populated by real and imaginary beasts, winged, quadrupeds, or limbless reptiles, who behaved oddly like people. Despite our differences, he tolerated me, although I sensed that over the years he stopped caring about my zoological muse. Or he had plainly given up trying to get me to go on the pathway of humanity. We had silently agreed to politely disagree on the more practical uses of the Muse, but I realized his message was bluntly clear: No more worker bees, but real human plebes. I also knew that he would never forget that I called him a “political poet” in print! **R**

Joe Rosenblatt, artist and poet, lives on Vancouver Island.

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