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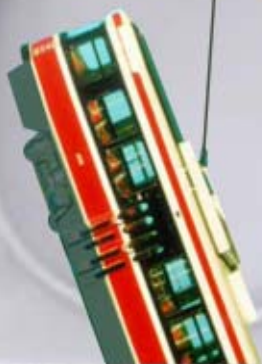
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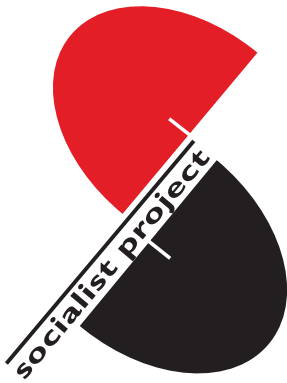
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RELAY

A SOCIALIST PROJECT REVIEW

**MUNICIPAL MALAISE
OPENINGS FOR TORONTO WORKERS
CRISIS AND SOCIAL REVOLT • EMERGING LEFT**





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

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Municipal Malaise:

Neoliberal Urbanism and the Future of Our Cities

Carlo Fanelli and Justin Paulson

The 2008 Annual Report by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, written when the Federal government was pulling in nearly \$14-billion in budget surpluses, paints a grim picture of the coming collapse of Canada's municipal infrastructure. The report found that Canada has used up 79% of the service life of its public infrastructure and has set the price of eliminating the infrastructural deficit at \$123-billion.¹ While that figure is already monumental, the chronic underfunding of municipal projects appears much worse when framed not in terms of the cities we have, but the cities we want to live in: the funding gap would have to take into consideration a range of issues including poverty and affordable housing, environmental protection, urban redesign and renewal, and expansion of the arts, cultural centres and other public spaces. Of course, fiscal crises in our cities are nothing new; the last three decades have been characterized by increased service demands, population growth, tax-shifting, pressures brought on by amalgamation, and federal and provincial offloading. Yet the ongoing recession seems to have become a pretext for consolidating and intensifying processes of "neoliberal urbanism."

NEOLIBERAL URBANISM: INCAPACITY LEADING TO DECLINE

Neoliberal urbanism broadly refers to a range of uneven urban processes taking place simultaneously in the communities where we live and work. This includes the privatization, restructuring, or elimination of public goods and municipal services; the shifting of the cost of maintenance of public resources onto the working class; the increasing precariousness of work; the devolution of responsibilities onto local governments without matching fiscal supports; the scaling of regulatory capacities upwards to regional or international institutions (characterized by little transparency, accountability, or public consultation); the reining in of the power of municipal unions and community groups; the scaling back of social entitlement programs; and expansion of so-called "public-private partnerships" that shift some of the responsibility for urban governance to corporations.

As a solution to the fiscal crisis, neoliberal restructuring of our cities will of course fail; it can only leave a larger social crisis in its wake. But the economic crisis is far more useful as a pretext than a target; indeed many of the processes of neoliberal restructuring directly aggravate the fiscal crisis. Although the 'Great Recession' may have struck a blow against neoliberalism's doctrine of the infallibility of the market, we agree with Greg Albo and Herman Rosenfeld's recent assertion in these pages (*Relay* #28) that two of neoliberalism's key material goals for our cities have already been realized: the subjection of all workers to strict market discipline, and the political disorganization of the Left. Orthodox responses to the crisis merely strengthen these consequences.

With the federal government on track toward a \$50-billion shortfall for the fiscal year 2009-10, a recent report by Kevin Page, the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer, warns that Canada is facing a structural deficit of at least \$20-billion by 2013-14.² Likewise, the province of Ontario, with an expected record shortfall of \$25-billion, is projecting deficits for the next seven years, while British Columbia is also forecasting their own record shortfall of \$2.8-billion. In total, ten of the thirteen provinces and territories are facing deficits. Meanwhile the municipal councils of the major urban centres, unable to count on provincial transfer payments, are responding to the crisis in the most orthodox manner possible: with service cuts, fee increases, privatizations, and what amounts to open warfare on the public-sector unions.

The purpose of this analysis is to examine the urban crises of Toronto, Vancouver and Ottawa – the first, third and fourth largest Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA) in Canada. We focus on these three cities in part due to familiarity, but also because they vividly demonstrate the malaise confronting Canadian cities today. We will examine some of the tough choices facing cities and their inhabitants, with an emphasis on transcending the pessimism which would accept as normal and inevitable the sacrifices being demanded of the working class. We will draw particular attention to recent and ongoing labour actions which represent an intensification of attacks against the public sector and its unions, and what we hope is the beginning of a sustained fight back.

NEOLIBERAL ASCENT IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Every recession in Canada since the mid-1970s has been used as a pretext to restructure the relations between capital, labour and state, and to radically reorient social policies to the benefit of the ruling class. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, federal and provincial governments responded to economic crisis by curbing real wages, razing social programs, and selling off assets, while adhering tightly to a kind of market fundamentalism. At the same time, the weakening of socialist elements within the labour movement, political parties, and academe cleared the way for neoliberalism's ascendancy in political, corporate, and academic discourse. While some 'progressives' succumbed to a fatalistic pessimism, others turned to emerging 'third way' alliances premised on the assumption that capitalism was both natural and here to stay.

The "common sense" promoted by neoliberalism – best popularized in Ontario by Mike Harris – maintains a cult-like privileging of individual economic liberties and personal responsibility, the idealization of the private sector as a measuring stick for public sector remuneration, the "need" to shift from the universal, public provision of social services to market provision with

attached user fees, the competitive lowering of taxation between jurisdictions, and tax-shifting from businesses to consumers and from property owners to the users of city services. The material fallout accompanying such ideological purity is clear: although productivity output per employee between 1980-2005 in Canada rose by more than 37%, real median wages have been stagnant since 1982. In short, with employee productivity rising and outpacing growth in wages, workers are receiving even fewer of the profits they produced. By the mid-1990s, income inequality in Canada reached levels not seen since the 1930s.³ This is nothing other than an upward transfer of wealth from one class to another.

Yet our cities, time after time, are taking it on the chin. While the federal and provincial governments have a variety of relatively flexible revenue sources (such as income, sales, corporate, resource and import taxes – tools which remain at their disposal, whether or not they choose to use them), only 8 cents on every dollar collected go back to Canada's municipalities. For our cities, property taxes remain the major source of funding, and from this, they must provide for their public utilities, public works, parks and recreational facilities, waste management, transit services, public housing, and a whole range of other social and community services and local initiatives. However, since the 1980s successive governments at both the federal and provincial levels looked to 'correct' their budget deficits by transferring greater amounts of fiscal responsibility onto municipalities, without providing for additional fiscal capacities. This process, commonly referred to as service 'downloading' (or the 'devolution revolution'), expanded the fiscal requirements of cities without any increases in revenue sharing or generation. This is particularly clear in the fiscal crisis of Canada's largest city; if, as some have argued, Ontario represents the pre-eminent neoliberal province, Toronto has likewise come to epitomize municipal neoliberalism at the urban scale.⁴ So we begin there.

TORONTO

The City of Toronto currently faces an estimated \$500-million budget shortfall for the fiscal year 2009-2010. City council, partly under the direction of Mayor David Miller (formerly of the NDP), has sought to cut social services, implement regressive levies such as the personal vehicle ownership tax, municipal land transfer tax and reduce commercial property taxes in favour of increased subsidies and financial support for businesses, all while seeking concessions from the city's unionized and non-unionized workforce. We are also witnessing a renewed interest in contracting out services, privatizing municipal assets, the competitive lowering of jurisdictional taxes, and so-called public-private partnerships ("P3s"). Amidst all the up-front cost-cutting, demands on Toronto continue to grow: social insecurity stemming from the economic crisis, continued population growth (Toronto is home to roughly 40% of Canada's recent immigrants and nearly 25% of the province's total population), and decaying urban infrastructure have only amplified the importance of the disappearing funds and services.

Despite generous tax breaks for commercial development and the self-employed professional classes – or perhaps because of

them – Toronto remains unable to meet its day to day funding requirements and the needs of its residents. Moreover, powerful business lobbies such as the Conference Board of Canada, the Toronto Board of Trade, and the Empire Club of Canada, for example, continue to lobby for the privatization of municipal assets. Leading mayoral candidates Rocco Rossi, Georgio Mammoliti and Sarah Thomson have all openly embraced such privatization, in addition to opposing Transit City's high-speed light rail and bicycle laneways. While the sale of public assets may provide one-time fiscal injections, the history of contracting out, P3s, and privatization shows such measures to be more expensive in the long-term, and with limited public oversight. They simply cannot resolve the structural inability of Toronto city council to meet the needs of its residents.

Toronto budget chief and Councilor Shelly Carroll recently suggested a municipal sales tax for Toronto, while requesting that city departments reduce expenditures by at least 5%. Despite already saving nearly \$135-million this past year from not filling vacancies, and assorted savings stemming from the 39-day civic workers strike, Toronto remains at least \$300-million in the red. With that in mind, council is already moving forward with both new tax and fee hikes and further cuts in services. Water rates are expected to rise by 9%, property taxes by 4% (having increased 12% since 2005), and the renting of city-run facilities and recreational programs by 4% (in addition to supplemental user-fees for swimming and skating); public transit, garbage collection, road tolls, and parking fees are on the rise as well.

Decades of growth on Bay Street, coupled with the casualization of employment (particularly in the low-wage service sector), have taken their toll on Toronto's poor. To make way for gentrification, the homeless and low-income populations were forced out of the urban core long before the recession. Toronto's official unemployment rate stands at 9.5%, but the 'real' number – including those who need more work than they can find just to make ends meet – is much higher. With more than 180,000 tenants living in poorly-funded public housing, and another 70,000 on a ten-year wait-list, welfare caseloads have risen nearly 25% when compared with 2008. People of colour, women, single-parent households, the differently-abled, students, and seniors continue to fair far worse as their skills are apparently 'uncompetitive' given the need to maximize profits. The criminalization of poverty and homelessness, however, continues full steam ahead with the Toronto police force's operating budget skyrocketing from \$541-million in 1999 to \$855-million just ten years later (roughly 35% more than the rate of inflation). Austerity does not, apparently, extend to the need to patrol the gentrified urban core. This can hardly be understood as anything other than a transfer of resources from the maintenance of public goods to the publicly-funded protection of private ones.

As we witnessed in the 2006 and 2008 Toronto Transit Commission, 2002 and 2009 civic workers, York University and Toronto Zellers Warehouse strikes, public sector unions generally and the smaller municipally-based private-sector unions in particular have been on the defensive and will remain under attack for some time. Pressures to lower the conditions of employ-

ment, renege on pension promises and decrease wages, especially in the context of battered unions in the automotive and manufacturing sectors, have been intensifying as the \$1.1-billion gap in annual infrastructure and operating expenses versus revenue reinforce fiscal austerity in Toronto. Indeed, if the 1990s recession witnessed a growing courageousness on the part of capital and the state to purge the federal and provincial public-sectors of their unions, the first decade of the twenty-first century is witnessing an intensification of such attacks, first in the private-sector and, now, in a coordinated assault on what's left of municipal strongholds in the public sphere.

While all three levels of government are facing mounting deficits and the poorest robbed of the resources enabling them to live, the Councilors and the business community can rest assured that Toronto's municipal image-branding quest and marketing strategy has been partly satisfied with the awarding of the PAN-AM games – at a cost of \$1.4-billion spread across 14 municipalities across Southern Ontario. The Athletics Village is already estimated to cost an additional \$1-billion, and – if previous sporting bids are any indication – this may rise. Is this how public money should be prioritized given the current fiscal impasse? As we note below, the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver (not to mention the legacy of the 1976 summer Olympics in Montreal, which became a 30-year fiscal fiasco) offers a lucid case study of the ways in which cost overruns supposedly leave provincial and municipal governments with limited options beyond tax increases, contracting-out, the selling of assets and reduced services.

VANCOUVER

A recent report by the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses (CFIB) claims that between 2000-2007 BC municipalities' average operating costs rose by nearly 44%, while inflation and population growth rose by only 25%.⁵ Besides population growth and inflation allegedly being the only variables to consider, the report went on to argue that the operating costs of 129 out of 153 municipalities in BC have risen. Commenting on their statistics, CFIB Vice-President Laura Jones remarked: "That kind of spending is disrespectful to taxpayers...and it's really out of touch with the economic climate. The number one thing they need to do is keep municipal wages in line with the private sector." Jones's response was, in particular, directed to the City of Vancouver, which is facing a \$60-million dollar shortfall and is looking to increase their revenues by cutting programs and raising taxes.

As in Ontario, BC municipalities have seen three decades of neoliberal urbanism transfer the fiscal burden onto cities without matching budgetary supports. The BC government is forecasting its own record-shortfall of \$2.8-billion with economic output expected to decline by 3% and unemployment projected to rise to 8.3% (having lost 52,000 jobs in the last 12-months), which is twice as much as 2008. As a result, the BC budget of 2009 outlined major cuts to arts funding, student aid, school repair grants, senior support services and victims of abuse, including mental health and addiction grants. What's more, nearly \$360-million in spending was cut from healthcare and \$245-million from the

Ministry of Environment, as well as imposing a wage-freeze on the public sector. In turn, the Liberal government of Gordon Campbell will seek to eliminate roughly 1,500 jobs with an additional 5% reduction in fiscal expenditures, while increasing monthly medical premiums, lowering taxes on capital and, as in Ontario, institute a harmonized sales tax.

The City of Vancouver has likewise decided to follow suit. As Vancouver's budgetary expenditures increased by nearly 16% between 2005-2008, Mayor Gregor Robertson recently announced that the city will look to close its budget gap by laying-off approximately 158 full-time positions. Added austerity measures include wage restraints, pay cuts, the withdrawal of social services, potential contracting-out and privatization of public utilities. Moreover, in capturing the public's attention with his desire to end street homelessness by 2015, Mayor Robertson and council are looking to swap prime penthouse real-estate space near Vancouver's Olympic village in exchange for the promise that developers will include some units with reasonable prices. Vancouver's version of affordable housing highlights the ongoing dilemma of a cash-strapped city trying to raise money, while private developers receive financial support and subsidies. Meanwhile, city council is warning of the difficult decisions which lay ahead as their 'financial stabilization plan' (Vancouver's version of Toronto's 'cost containment measures') threatens to raise water rates by 9%, in addition to a host of sewage and garbage fees and transit and recreational service cost hikes.

Meanwhile, business and conservative lobby groups such as the Vancouver Board of Trade and Vancouver Fair Tax Coalition (VFTC) continue to press for decreased taxes on businesses with a corresponding shift to consumers and residents. As the VFTC website boasts: "As a result of the hard work by the VFTC, city council agreed to approve another 1% tax shift [every year for the next five years] from non-residential properties to residential properties."⁶ Yet, in shifting the financial burden from businesses and landlords to consumers and residents, the City of Vancouver will lose revenue and erode its own fiscal capacities. In addition, the recently introduced Assistance to Shelter Act, which represents a return to the Vagrancy laws which criminalized poverty and homelessness so vividly captured by Engels in the *Condition of the Working Class in England*, aims to force the urban poor from Vancouver's central core (where services have also been historically concentrated) into the outer regions of the city. They could, of course, always take a page from the City of Atlanta who in 1996 bribed the transient urban poor with bus tickets out of the city.

The 2007 Metro Vancouver civic workers strike and lock-out, which included librarians, road maintenance personnel, social service administrators, waste management, and child care workers, remains fresh on the minds of many. If the recent back-to-work legislation by the provincial Liberals (in the case of the seven-month strike by BC paramedics) which did little to address the main issues such as scheduling, staffing levels, training, faltering equipment and the needs of rural communities, is an indication of looming labour relations between the government and its unions, it would seem that the turn from consent to coercion is continuing unabated. HandyDart workers are a par-



ticularly interesting case in point. On October 26th, 2009, Local 1724 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, representing roughly 500 workers, set up picket lines. Local 1724 workers provide approximately 5000 daily trips for seniors and the disabled, and in nearly thirty years they had never gone on strike. However, when the government-funded service was recently contracted out to a for-profit subsidiary of the American corporation MVT, the company pressed workers to abandon their pensions, cap health benefits, subcontract office and maintenance workers, forfeit a guaranteed seven and a half hour work-day, institute short-term contracts forcing workers to reapply for their positions, as well as additional surveillance and discipline proposals, limitations on transfer and promotion, and the dismissal of employees on long-term disability and maternity leave. Dave Watt, the union's local president, argued: "This company [MVT] has already gotten money from Translink [Metro Vancouver's regional transportation authority] to give us a decent collective agreement. Instead they are trying to maximize their profit margin by taking away our pension plan."⁷⁷

In early last November the union rejected MVT's "final offer," which offered workers nearly \$7 less per hour compared with other transit workers in greater Vancouver, by an overwhelming margin. After the two sides once again failed to reach a mediated agreement in late December, and following ten weeks of strike action, they both agreed to send the dispute to binding arbitration. The imposed settlement gave HandyDart workers a salary increase from \$21.30 in 2010 to \$22.05 in 2011, \$23.15 in 2012 and \$24.30 in 2013, and offered drivers and office workers access to a municipal pension plan. Nevertheless, HandyDart workers will continue to be paid less than their counterparts in the greater Vancouver area.

The HandyDart case offers an example of what we can expect more of in all of our cities: a community-based service being transferred to a private company in order to erode union contracts, trim the municipality's expenditures and extract concessions from labour in the name of 'efficiency' and 'responsible

governance.' Most troubling, it seemed to have public support. Conservative mouthpiece Harvey Enchin was not speaking only for himself when he argued in the *Vancouver Sun*: "The company could have told all the unions to take a hike, reject all of the existing agreements, and compel any new union organized to represent the workers to try to negotiate a first contract from scratch. The company could have then stonewalled until the union, unable to reach an agreement, was decertified."⁷⁸ (Enchin went so far as to allege ties to New York's mafia.) Despite the fact that the strikers continued to provide some services during the strike, such as for those requiring dialysis or cancer-related treatments, the PR victory – as in so many recent strikes – went to the neoliberals.

Lastly, a brief comment on the forthcoming Winter Olympics. Government bureaucrats, the business media and pundits have been raving about the expected economic benefits of the 2010 games. Security for the games is already \$800-million over budget (and will total some \$1-billion for security alone), partial paid-leave for BC civil servants who volunteer for the Olympics is estimated to cost the public \$28-million, and the BC government is purchasing an additional \$1-million in tickets. Such somber reminders of the public costs and private gains of hosting such an event had even the *National Post* suggesting that the Vancouver Olympics have received "massive corporate welfare from all tiers of government." The question was then raised: "So who will pay for cost overruns, shaky financing and grandiose planning?"⁷⁹ While claims that such events are an economic catalyst through hotel revenues, hospitality, tourism and modest upgrades in transit and affordable housing, the answer, unfortunately, seems very clear: they will try to make the residents of Vancouver pay, and the poorest residents will be asked to pay the most. Few of these moves are truly particular to Vancouver. The Olympics merely provide a seemingly-unassailable rationale and political cover for pursuing them. Here, as in the rest of our cities, neoliberal orthodoxy – in this case characterized by the privatization of public goods, regressive taxation, and public-sector layoffs – advances as it usually does: in the guise of normality.

OTTAWA

Public services in the nation's capital fare slightly better, but the city remains under-funded. As Ottawa continues to be squeezed by the province and the federal government, like other cities it is responding by shifting increasing amounts of the fiscal burden from property owners and those who can most afford it to the end-users of public services. Closing the \$95-million shortfall projected for 2010 is resulting in few outright service cuts, but the costs will be felt most prominently by the city's working class.

The budget passed at the end of January was not as bad for public services as had originally been proposed: some transit routes scheduled to be cut were taken off the chopping block, while homeowners on tree-lined suburban streets will continue to benefit from city funding for tree pruning and stump removal (a service contracted out to local businesses, but which was also in danger of being cut). The funding of the shortfall, however, remained quite orthodox: the Council capped individual prop-

erty tax increases (based on assessments that are already lagging property values by a significant margin) at 3.77%, while increasing transit fares 7.5% (a short bus ride in town will now cost \$3.25 – as compared to \$2.50 in Vancouver and \$3.00 in Toronto), rental fees for community facilities by 2%, and water/sewer rates by 4%.¹⁰ This was spun as a way to keep taxes low, the declared priority of Mayor O'Brien and much of the Council, but end-user fees for public services are little more than a hidden tax on the poor; they should not be understood as anything other than thinly-disguised class warfare.

Thin disguises, however, work well in Ottawa; the capital is perhaps unique among large Canadian cities in having very little in the way of an organized left in city politics. Although there is not (as yet) a major sporting event coming to Ottawa to suck up public resources, the biggest urban planning controversy in recent years revolved around what to do with the decaying stadium at Lansdowne Park, in the historic Glebe neighbourhood. When the City Council proposed a sole-source, no-bid, \$250-million public-private partnership to redevelop the entire park in such a way that could attract box stores and a CFL team, the Glebe residents and businesses offered vociferous opposition – but of the NIMBY variety. The opposition failed, and the proposal passed in late 2009. But the incident highlighted the extent to which urban planning in Ottawa has simply been lurching from one private business deal to another, with no organized left pushing for a comprehensive vision of what kind of city we want to live in.

Every year there is a smattering of public debate about which programs should be cut, which should be spared, and from where the additional revenue should come. Yet what we have witnessed in Ottawa – and we presume this is similar elsewhere – are demands made by single-interest groups appearing before Council to defend their turf, or to insist on a specific provision for them in the municipal budget. Most of these are important demands. Yet their piecemeal approach means that any successes in one area, as important as they may be, are simply offset in another – effectively pitting parks against ambulances, student transit passes against the actual number of bus trips, community centres against low personal tax rates. In the absence of a credible alternative in public discourse, and a social movement pushing for it, the 'new normal' in Ottawa is, as elsewhere, the maintenance of 'competitive' business climates, little public input into urban (re)development, and P3s that stand to contribute significantly to the city's fiscal crisis while fattening a few pockets in the process. Only three years ago, Ottawa had to bail out two prior P3 recreation arena projects;¹¹ but memories are short. A strong Right to the City movement (as has developed elsewhere in the world under a variety of names) could change this – but one has yet to develop.

Meanwhile, the OC Transpo strike, which paralyzed Ottawa for seven weeks last winter, was a shot across the bow of public sector unions; the intention, barely concealed by Mayor O'Brien, was simply to break the union and offload costs onto labour. On the only issue that really mattered to the union – that of driver scheduling – the city refused to talk, thus precipitating the strike in the coldest part of the Ottawa winter. The city gambled (correctly) that there could be little public sympathy for a bus strike

when it was -20C outside, while the union ignored the public and focused on the internal dynamics of the strike itself. In the end, the dispute was forced into binding arbitration.

There was nothing technically wrong with the logic of the union: as long as discipline remained on the picket line, the union would survive. It did not matter how much hate mail flowed to the *Ottawa Citizen* or what the Mayor was saying on television. Yet the strike caused deep divisions within Ottawa's working class; there was little solidarity with the union amongst the riders, to whom there seemed not to have been sufficient outreach before or during the strike. For those who do not normally ride the bus, day after day Ottawans were told how much the strike was costing them – with the onus placed on the union rather than the city. Outside some sectors of academia, it seemed there was no popular support for the strike at all. This has repercussions that go beyond the bus drivers themselves, for it was, again, the logic of neoliberalism that won the day: unionized public-sector workers were treated as if they were spoiled children who enjoyed holding a helpless city hostage until their demands were met.

Nothing could be further from the truth; but the strike thus highlighted a particularly vexing problem for public sector unionism: although people want public services, they are not always willing to go to bat for those who provide them. The inconvenience the strike posed to other workers may have had a great deal to do with this: the museum workers, on strike earlier this winter, seemed to garner a great deal more public sympathy. Without cross-sectoral political or social movement unionism, or at least a strong left making a dent in popular consciousness, individual public sector strikes can easily be spun by the city in such a way as to reinforce neoliberal common sense rather than challenge it. In such a climate, any public sector strike that is not a clear win becomes part of a long-term defeat.

CONCLUSION: HOW TO RESPOND?

So how do we get from the cities we live in to the cities we want? Processes of neoliberal urbanism will continue apace in the absence of left alternatives mobilized at the municipal level. We have to think strategically and go beyond mere defensive posturing. The fiscal crisis is real, but both ends of it – the increased need for public services and the declining revenue base – are caused by capital, not the working class nor the successes of its unions.

In the current funding model, the public provision of municipal services is made possible only by physical growth (new properties mean new property taxes), provincial and federal grants, and fees and service charges. During an economic downturn, the first is unlikely (while the existing tax base remains flat until home prices pick up, and assessments catch up with them). Grants, meanwhile, dry up in the absence of sustained stimulus. Thus the only options remaining during fiscal crisis appear to be to levy new taxes or raise existing tax rates, cut services, sell off services or assets, raise user fees, or cut costs by squeezing labour or developing P3s (though the latter are often more expensive in the end). Thinking inside this box, the fight is then about which ser-

vices get cut or privatized, and *whose* taxes and fees get raised, and at what proportion.

Public-sector unions are on the front lines of this battle. Currently in a defensive position as they come under attack at all levels (federal, provincial, and municipal), they of course must defend their members against rollbacks of hard-won benefits. Yet the vitriol directed at them is intense – as if they live lavish lives at the expense of non-unionized workers. The OC Transpo strike in Ottawa, the municipal workers’ strike in Toronto, and the HandyDart strike in Vancouver suggest that there is much to do to overcome popular hostility toward striking workers. Changing this attitude is not primarily the task of the unions themselves (although in the OC Transpo and Toronto civic workers case, their attempts at public relations were disastrous and could certainly be improved), but of the broader left. Although there are some ‘green shoots’ to be found during recent labour actions, the solidarity between non-unionized and unionized workers, and between the general public and striking workers, remains in a deep crisis of its own. We need to do much more to support the efforts of workers on the picket lines, and one way to do this is to fight harder to make a strong public sector once again part of common sense. On the left, we know that the public provision of goods and services, well-managed in a way that fosters sustainable development and social justice initiatives, and which is accountable to the community, significantly improves the standard of living in our cities. We should be doing more to ensure that the public at large understands this as well – and fight to make sure property owners and the wealthiest among us pay their fair dues to keep the public sector strong. The Right seems to always be a step ahead of us when it comes to shaping common sense; it’s high time we took the offensive here. This needs to be highlighted in every social movement of labour and activists.

But part of the problem is structural: Canadian unions today are designed to look out for their members, not for the working class as a whole, and as long as they remain under attack and permanently on the defensive, there is little else they can do. They cannot transcend the institutional and legal limitations that dictate so much of their behaviour. This leads us to our next point – that we should think outside the box as well. While we certainly need to be pushing the burden of the fiscal crisis onto the capitalist class and off the backs of workers, and we can (and should) argue for greater commitments by the federal and provincial governments to alleviate the fiscal crisis of the cities, it should be clear that the management and funding of Canada’s municipalities is fundamentally broken.

Fixing them requires a new kind of broad social movement unionism, and a great deal of collective capacity building in order to bring together workers, social justice activists, and community groups. In short, we ought to stop treating cities as the backbone of capital and treat them as the places that most of us live, work and play. Our collective struggles have tended to take the form of demands *of* the city, while they ought to be based in class consciousness – and urban consciousness – and demand instead the opportunity to restructure the city to serve our needs rather than those of capital.

The good news is that some of this is already happening, not only in various parts of South America but also here in Canada. In Toronto, unions and social justice activists together are asking, within the context of what may become a broad social movement, how we can make public services more community-driven, in such a way as to address existing inequalities and environmental concerns while expanding access and improving the quality of life in the city. The Greater Toronto Workers’ Assembly, which came to fruition as we were putting this essay together, may herald a new generation of social movement unionism, and a new model of working class mobilization. If successful, we look forward to its adoption in Vancouver, Ottawa, and elsewhere. **R**

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New Openings for Toronto Workers

Herman Rosenfeld

In the context of an economic crisis where working people in Ontario have suffered major setbacks, organized labour's response has so far been disappointing. Apart from a few public sector strikes forced by employer concession demands, some longer-term strikes against concessions (such as the Vale-Inco struggle), a number of workplace occupations demanding severance and a few demonstrations calling for pension protection and EI changes, there has been little resistance. This has forced activists in the union movement, and the left more widely, to confront the limits of our present organizational situation, and to begin to look for new ways to move forward. It is clear now that this cannot be avoided: rather than dislodging neoliberalism, the financial crisis appears now to be allowing neoliberalism to gain new momentum in efforts to restructure the public sector. Indeed, there appears new momentum for wage and contract concessions in the private sector and for rollbacks in the public sector.

These struggles and the impasse in union responses have sparked two important new initiatives to build union and working class capacities to fight-back. One has come from the Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYRLC) mobilizing formal union structures, and the other comes from a new alliance of community organizations, socialists and labour activists in the form of a workers' assembly.

THE STEWARDS' ASSEMBLY AND AFTER

The May 7, 2009 coming together of over 1,600 stewards, workplace representatives, staff, and other union reps in Toronto around the necessity of fighting against attacks by employers and

governments was an unprecedented and impressive exception that brought some hope for forward motion. It was organized by the Toronto Labour Council led by President John Cartwright. The meeting brought together a mix of workplace representatives from public and private sector unions from across all of the different factions within the labour movement. It was the first such meeting in living memory and was the result of an impressive organizing effort.

This was the latest in a series of projects by the Cartwright leadership of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council. Previous efforts included the electoral project to tilt the balance of the Toronto Board of Education in favour of those who wanted to challenge the Conservative Provincial government; a movement to raise the minimum wage – and engage different communities as well as unions in the process; fighting against water privatization; arguing for local sourcing rules for the city government; the more recent Good Jobs Coalition project and the ongoing support of labour struggles.

The meeting aimed, as Cartwright noted, to “reach deeply down into the labour movement and engage the true-front-line activists that are our stewards.” It's important to note that rank and file leaders aren't necessarily politically engaged. Efforts to involve them in larger struggles are extremely difficult but absolutely essential to building a response to the crisis. As an introduction to the crisis and the necessity of fighting back, this meeting was very important.

While most of those who attended the meeting felt extremely good about the experience (including me), the jury is still out on whether or not the assembly will actually contribute to developing the mobilizational capacity of the union movement, stimulating a larger movement to resist attacks by business and governments, building support for the current round of public sector struggles and challenging the ideological assault being waged against the rights of unions and working people.

The actual assembly covered a number of areas: a presentation on the origins and causes of the crisis; a series of testimonials from the floor by participants from different key union struggles in Toronto over the past few years and from individuals victimized by outsourcing, workplace closures, racism, and concession demands; speeches by CLC President Ken Georgetti, John Cartwright, Winnie Ng (a leader in the Good Jobs Coalition) among others; a short period set aside for



John MacLennan

Historic Toronto Labour Council's Steward Assembly, May 7, 2009.

small group discussions; speeches by leaders of major union affiliates pledging their collective resistance to the crisis measure of governments and employers; and a “surprise” visit by Toronto Mayor David Miller.

The assembly came away with a commitment to build support for EI reforms and pensions associated with the Canadian Labour Congress campaigns. It ended with a request that the stewards go back to their workplaces, circulate, and discuss the EI petition and mobilize for upcoming political actions demanding reforms.

WHAT DID IT ACCOMPLISH?

Walking out of the session, participants could not help but feel good about the potential there and hoped that it would be the beginning of an ongoing movement. But events that unfolded since the assembly – raise a number of further issues and questions. There were a few limitations to the meeting:

- Rather than being an actual assembly, with open discussion, debate, and space for the stewards to initiate points and ideas, it felt more like a process of conveying information. In order to encourage the creation of an ongoing Stewards’ Movement, a living, more participatory process is necessary.

- The close ties to Mayor Miller, and the constant references to NDP politicians, showed that the politics of the assembly was confined within the “legitimate” institutional parameters of the labour movement. While some NDP politicians did play a positive role in the minimum wage campaign, the party as a whole has notably failed to lead on even such basic campaigns as EI reform and has been absent from any discussions on alternatives during the crisis. Miller’s address to the assembly reflected the wide “popular front” like platform that has dominated labour politics in Toronto in the current period. This alliance has meant a modest political program that rests on lower business taxes and co-operation between labour and private investors. There was little mention of any vision of a different way of creating jobs and shaping investment, or the need for a political movement that might articulate such a vision.

- Even the critique of the financial sector was limited to complaints about speculation and excess profits – rather than a real explanation about the way finance affects jobs, investment, and communities. We need to avoid one-dimensional populism that poses the problem as being “monopolies or financial speculators against the people,” pulling the movement into an alliance with industrial capitalists. The problem with that type of approach is all too evident in the auto sector. There was no mention of demands to control and shape investment through reforms such as nationalizing the banks.

The success of the Stewards’ Assembly raises another set of questions:

- If the Toronto Labour Council was able to organize a Stewards’ Assembly, is this happening in other cities across Canada? If not, why isn’t it?

- The CLC campaign remains tied to uninspired and relatively ineffective forms of action. Since the assembly in May, there has been one demonstration in Toronto demanding action on EI reform and pension protection. The turnout was disappointing and wasn’t followed up (or proceeded) by more militant actions, such as occupations of EI offices. Where will this campaign go?

- Will there be any follow-up with this first effort to bring stewards together from across the city or was this a one-off activity? If there are plans to do it again and build on this initial assembly, what forms might that take? (As of this writing, the TYRLC has announced a planned Stewards Assembly for public sector unionists for April 2010).

- Will there be efforts to build networks of resistance and solidarity between groups of stewards across the city? Are there plans to produce materials to help stewards explain the crisis to their co-workers and argue for new forms of collective resistance, led by stewards within workplaces?

- Are there plans to discuss ways of uniting workplace representatives with workers in communities and those not unionized who are also looking for ways to extend and deepen their struggles?

The Toronto Labour Council has taken the lead in a number of areas over the past few years. Once again, in the current context, the Stewards’ Assembly can represent an important counterweight to the defensiveness of Ontario’s labour movement. But the Council operates within the constraints of the official union structures, limited to a certain extent by the conservatism of the leadership of the affiliates and the political and economic structures of the city – even as it works to stretch the boundaries of those limitations.

Meetings like the Stewards’ Assembly have the potential to become a springboard toward a larger and broader effort to educate and mobilize workers across Toronto in resisting current attacks and developing political approaches independent of business-dominated projects that currently dominate the agenda.

THE CUPE STRIKES AND POLITICAL DEFEAT

The events of the summer and fall also revealed some of the challenges and limits of the Labour Council’s strategy at the time. Governments at all levels have been gearing up for a general attack on the public sector. This was already evident in the CUPE strikes in both Windsor and Toronto during the summer of 2009 and the demands by employers for concessions. The municipal workers strikes were settled with mixed results. The Windsor workers were unable to prevent imposed takeaways after a bitter strike. Toronto workers did prevent the city from eliminating paid sick time (although this survived in a modified form) and held off a series of other demands by the employer.

Overall, the Toronto municipal workers did win an economic victory, but both CUPE strikes against demands for concessions

suffered important *political* defeats. There was little effort or resources used to appeal to the working class as a whole or the general public in defence of the public services involved, or over the stakes involved in defending the rights of unionized public sector workers. Coming on the heels of massive efforts by the business community and their spokespeople to demonize unionized auto workers, the public attacks on the so-called privileges of public sector workers struck a deep chord to a depoliticized general population. The utter lack of a response by CUPE to these attacks helped to undermine the political effects of the important economic victory of the striking municipal workers and will make it easier for future waves of attacks on the public sector unions and the services themselves, sure to come in the future.

The experience of the municipal strike also signalled a crisis in the political strategy pursued by the labour movement in Toronto. The “centre-left” Miller administration failed to differentiate itself from the hard right city politicians who demanded concessions from the workers. In a manner reminiscent of the Bob Rae Social Contract of 1993, the Toronto Mayor attacked his labour base, in an effort to appease (rather than challenge and build an alternative to) the right. Labour for the most part deserted Miller (aside from an opportunistic show of support by the CAW at Labour Day) and, of course, the right only further attacked him for being too soft on the public sector unions. The reliance on the support of Miller – and his alliance with the private sector, and the accommodation of the more left-oriented social democratic voices on city council to the business alliance – left the mainstream labour movement in Toronto and the Labour Council as well, searching for a new strategy.

Since Miller’s withdrawal from the Toronto Mayoralty race, there has been a relentless attack by the right on everything from budgeting to privatization and outsourcing. Given the horrible political defeat signalled by the failure to build a consistent defence of municipal workers rights, even the more progressive voices on Toronto city council are now in the crosshairs of the shrill and hysterical right-wing offensive.

There have been other labour struggles in the late summer and fall. In Toronto, CAW workers at Zellers warehouse – tied to the new U.S. owners of Hudson’s Bay Company – struck against efforts to reduce their wages by 30%; CEP maintenance workers at Cadillac-Fairview fought to protect against mass firings aimed at eliminating the union; Steelworkers at Vale-Inco continued a strike in Sudbury against concessions demands, while, after much bluster and posturing, the CAW gave up concessions at Ford (matching those at GM and Chrysler) – while rank and file workers in the U.S. *rejected* the UAW’s efforts to get them to buy-into another round of takeaways.

It’s hard to see how the Stewards’ Assembly contributed all that much to these struggles. Certainly the Toronto Labour Council did build support for all of the Toronto-based strikes and fightbacks (and publicly responds to the ongoing attacks on the public sector and worker rights being raised by business voices on a regular basis today) but there was hardly any resonance from the Assembly and little to show from the exercise. There was no

effort to transmit the energy and enthusiasm of the Assembly for a fightback to the crisis into the major political struggle that was unfolding in Toronto for municipal workers. Hopefully, a public sector Stewards’ Assembly planned for April will contribute to moving things forward.

THE GOOD GREEN JOBS COALITION

The Good Green Jobs Conference, held in early November 2009, emerged as a key Labour Council project. The conference was extremely well attended and had all kinds of activists from unions and community groups and coalitions. Most impressive was the participation of many activists from racialized communities from across the city, all involved in one way or another in the struggle over the environment. There were lots of social democratic politicians, but genuine left activists as well. The orientation from the front of the platform was around making the environment a space for good job creation in a way that avoided what U.S. environmental justice leader Van Jones referred to as “eco-apartheid.”

There was a lot of emphasis on equity and inclusion, but little on the need to avoid eco-capitalism (although, in fairness, there were some references). The final speaker, after all of the workshops finished, was Clayton Thomas Mueller, the First Nations leader of a campaign against the Tar Sands, led by the Indigenous Environmental Network who explicitly rejected capitalism as a framework for addressing the environment. But by that time most of the discussions had already taken place. By placing it within the discourse of aboriginal justice, it made it somehow divorced from the issue of job creation, easy to embrace in the framework of social justice, but with little implications for what people would actually work toward today.

The workshops were divided into three themes: Green Infrastructure, Green Manufacturing and Youth. Each workshop had over 150 people, but they were divided into table of about 10 people. On those tables, people had discussions on the themes. In my table, the discussion was at a high and very satisfying level (I attended the Green Manufacturing workshop). At each of the workshops, before the discussion started there were panels. In my workshop, the panel included someone from Thunder Bay talking about the struggle to get Toronto to source new streetcars from Bombardier (it was an excellent presentation, but the political framework was social democratic and didn’t deconstruct the unique elements of that experience, such as the partnership with the employer); someone from the private sector (who brought a thoroughly business-oriented perspective), and an activist from a coalition to create decent jobs (he called for a TTC maintenance yard) in the area formerly used by Kodak. His conclusions were very interesting. There was no opportunity to engage with the panellists, however.

It turned out that the level of discussion in the workshops as a whole was very low: most of the points made were formulaic (“we need more education”...) and, apart from the infrastructure section (which people seemed to instinctively see as public, rather than private), there was almost no sense of why the private sector

needs to be marginalized and limited and that a public and co-operative sector needs to be the principal form of green job creation. When our table wrote this out as one of our points, one of the facilitators of the larger workshop remarked, “I guess you guys are in love with big government.” When pressed, she referred to “positive examples of ‘blue-green’ alliances in the USA.” When all of the tables had summarized their discussions, it seemed that the main political issue they tended to address, was the need for equity, participation and such issues (all important, but lacking in the issue of class and private capital).

The conference did bring together a slew of trade unionists. Many from the CAW, for example, were rank and file environmental activists or engaged in important local struggles such as support for Zellers workers, as well as leaders from the union. The workshops were open and the outcome of those discussions honestly reflected where ordinary trade unionists are at on the environment and jobs. Moreover, many of the activists invited to the conference were (and still are) involved in some extremely creative and interesting experiments (such as the effort to engage activist youth in the Jane-Finch area in environmental activism and job creation).

THE GREATER TORONTO WORKERS' ASSEMBLY

What the Stewards' Assembly and the Green Jobs Conference lacked was an anti-capitalist approach, and a collective capacity to push the labour movement toward class struggles beyond where the affiliates individually are at. This is understandable, but it suggests the need for socialists to build new forms of worker and community activist alliances and structures to break the impasse of union politics in Toronto and Canada. One such fledgling effort is the recent efforts to form the Greater Toronto Workers' Assembly (www.workersassembly.ca).

The Assembly process works on a number of levels. On the one hand, it seeks to create a new form of working class organization, bringing together working people in unions, in communities, employed and unemployed and those who are unable to work. Building on a militant, anti-capitalist and class struggle orientation, it will address forms of division and segmentation that neoliberal capitalism has created and working within and outside existing community and labour organizations, it will develop capacities to move beyond the current level of defensive acceptance of the capitalist offensive.

On another level, the Assembly includes much of the socialist and anti-capitalist left and members come from a number of activist groups and movements in Toronto. Therefore, the Assembly serves as a space to create new forms of unity and common practise on the left. The Assembly is not a coalition or network – people join and participate as individuals, committed to a Vision Statement, and building a democratic, activist organization. Engaging in common campaigns, building common approaches, planning together, debating and discussing activities, political discussion and debate and summarizing experiences will lead to a higher level of unity and can contribute to the growth of a more unified and sophisticated socialist left movement.

A BEGINNING PROCESS

The Assembly idea was initiated by the Socialist Project, but it was soon taken up as a collective project of the radical left and anti-capitalist individuals in labour and community movements. A series of Consultas (consultation meetings), held in the summer of 2009 and into the early autumn built momentum toward an initial Assembly. The meetings dealt with important issues underlying the project, such as the relationship between union and community approaches, how an Assembly would relate to the activist Labour Council in Toronto and the issue of class.

The first Assembly, held in October 2009, included about 150 participants from unions, community groups and movements, individual activists, members of left political groups and anti-oppression movements. It established the basic principles of an Assembly, through a series of intensive workshop discussions. The Assembly agreed on the principal of individual membership, set up a voluntary, interim co-ordinating committee, and set about the process of establishing criteria for collective campaigns, a proposed Vision statement, and the next Assembly.

The second Assembly in January 2010 included 200 participants and had a large discussion about possible campaign choices, adopted a Vision statement, debated issues of structure and set up a series of committees on Campaigns, Internal and External Education, Membership and Finance and a Labour Caucus. People also began officially joining the Assembly as individuals and volunteering for the committees. Soon after, a group of artists formed an Art Committee.

The [Vision statement](#) gives a flavour of the kind of project that the Assembly is envisaged to be. The following are the third and fifth paragraphs of the document:

The Assembly calls on activists to join together in a democratic process to create a new politics. It is both a space for dialogue and learning within the popular left movement and an organ of common action. Seeking to move beyond coalition and network politics the Assembly is an organization that individuals belong to without giving up their membership and allegiances to community organizations, unions and left groups. We are committed to developing our understanding of what we're up against, who our potential allies are, and to organize and act in new ways that will take us from a politics of resistance to emancipatory alternatives....

While capitalism itself has created ongoing suffering and oppression in its “normal” phases, the crisis has made things worse. But crises do not just come and go; they bring both great dangers and significant opportunities. Historically, they have represented new openings for either the consolidation of, or shifts in, social power. The question is whether we can take advantage of the new openings and threats to build a new kind of politics. The Assembly represents one answer to that challenge. (complete statement at: www.workersassembly.ca/vision)

Currently, the committees are working to further sharpen the Assembly's collective capacity to choose and develop political campaigns, gain a presence and approach to key ongoing struggles, create democratic structures, begin internal educational projects and plan the third Assembly, to be held at the end of April.

REFORMING A WORKING CLASS POLITICS

It is clear that we have a long way to go in order to rebuild a working class movement that has been defeated, fragmented and disorganized by neoliberal capitalism. One element is the efforts by the Toronto Labour Council to take a more activist approach to its work in supporting strikes and seeing the Toronto working class as much more than the members who gather in monthly meetings to report on their local union activities and popularize CLC policies. To keep moving in this direction requires some political daring in the leadership to break out of conventional politics in organizing and inside the union movement, and beyond the increasingly narrow political confines of the current municipal politics in Toronto.

It is difficult to imagine a new union movement emerging in Toronto and Canada, based on historical experience and the current political forces on the left, without the building of a new socialist movement. This movement will have to have its roots in the different segments of the Toronto and Canadian working classes, with all its racial, gender, sexual and regional diversities. Given the legacy of defeats and setbacks over the period of neoliberalism, it is difficult to know where to begin organizationally, as opposed to simply realizing that the coalitional politics and social fora that we have struck in the past have not been adequate to the tasks at hand.

Even if we know where we would like to go in having a union and socialist movement again able to contest political power

in Canada and Toronto, there is no clear map of how to get there. But a big step in that direction that would help build greater political unity and strategic clarity could come through participation in campaigns and other activities in spaces like a Workers' Assembly. This could help shape collective efforts and struggles that would begin to find some basis of unity in working class communities and across their organizations. As this capacity grows, it could begin to challenge the logic and power of capital. Support for major strikes like that at Vale-Inco in Sudbury, or of rubber workers in Toronto, or developing campaigns for free public transit and decent incomes for all working people, are part of re-asserting a capacity in our movements and cities for political struggle, not just as individuals or an isolated union local, but as a class. It would be easy to imagine building from there to defence of the public sector against cutbacks, but also as the core of new economic strategies or political efforts to develop alternatives to the deluge of neoliberal policies currently on hand. Or to even begin taking on the immense – but absolutely necessary and inescapable need – of working from inside and outside to transform our trade unions. Eventually we need to be able to put on the agenda the task of building a mass socialist political party.

The new organizational experiments coming from alternative starting points in the Toronto labour movement are the beginning of recognition that the old ways can no longer continue as they have been. It is time to move on. They are both new openings that need to be encouraged and nurtured. They need to be copied by other labour councils and socialist and community activists across Canada. This is not in the particularities of design, but out of the need and vision to rebuild our union movements and the left. **R**

Herman Rosenfeld is a retired union activist.

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Cadillac Fairview: Where was the Labour Movement?

Sam Gindin

On March 5, 2010, after a conflict that stretched over almost 9 months, the maintenance and skilled trades workers of CEP (Communications, Energy & Paperworkers Union of Canada) Local 2003 working in office towers in downtown Toronto voted to accept an offer from real estate developer Cadillac Fairview. The victory was bittersweet. On the one hand, the Cadillac Fairview workers had forced an arrogant corporation to return to the table and to do so with a substantially improved severance offer. On the other, the workers went through hell to get there and at the end of the day the jobs and the bargaining unit were lost.

Though the struggle of the workers was inspiring at many levels and could point to a partial victory, the same could not be said for the response of the broader labour movement. In this regard, the outcome was clearly negative. The movement had been tested and found wanting. When a corporation with a portfolio of \$17-billion takes on a unit of 61 workers and arbitrarily sacks workers and gets rid of the union, it is the labour movement as a whole that is being challenged. Allowing this to happen without a serious pushback effectively exposes the labour movement as a paper tiger. It encourages corporations to be still more aggressive – if this is happening in unionized plants, it's not hard to imagine what is happening in non-union workplaces and to much more vulnerable part-time and contract workers (a hint of this was evident in the recent lockout of UNITE-HERE workers at the Woodbine Racetrack).

Unless and until the movement collectively figures out how to reorganize itself to match what it is up against in these times, things are going to get a lot worse for working people. Before turning to what such an alternative response might involve, it's useful to summarize some of the background to the Cadillac-CEP conflict.

THE COMPANY

Cadillac Fairview is "one of North America's largest investors, owners and managers of commercial real estate." This includes 84 properties, the most prominent of which are the Toronto-Dominion Centre and Toronto Eaton Centre, the Pacific Centre in the heart of downtown Vancouver, the Chinook Centre in Calgary and Fairview Ponte Claire in Montreal. Cadillac is fully owned by the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP). The Plan's fund includes monies contributed not just by the government as employer but also the teachers, yet its decisions are independent of any teacher or union control.

In May 2009, the company announced it would outsource or get rid of 20-30% of the workforce. It refused to increase severance payments for those whose jobs would be lost beyond the legally mandated minimum levels and – astoundingly even in this era of corporate extremism – it asked all the workers to give up their seniority and reapply for their jobs with six-month probationary periods. If subsequently dismissed, severance pay would be based on their new seniority, not the seniority they previously

had. When the workers refused, the corporation waited until the agreement was over and on that day, June 14th, 2009, Cadillac Fairview locked out and replaced all the workers. A month later the company officially fired them. (On December 10, 2009 the corporation went so far as to use a Toronto by-law to force the workers to shut down their shelters outside the TD Centre).

The decisive factors to Cadillac's bottom line are trends in real estate values and corporate occupancy; the labour costs of the workers who maintain Cadillac's shopping malls and office buildings are marginal to its profitability. In the first stages of negotiating the latest agreement with Local 2003, worker concessions weren't even raised. Then the financial crisis hit and Cadillac was under pressure to cut every corner possible. Because it could do very little about the larger economic issues or affect its relationships to other businesses, it looked to place the burden on its workers. That it expected little or no serious response from the labour movement as a whole left Cadillac Fairview more confident in this attack.

Cadillac Fairview's turn to gutting worker's rights wasn't, in other words, about its survival or even about any significant impact on its profitability. It was about leaving more for its executives and stockholders. Ultimately, Cadillac Fairview acted as it did because it *could*.

THE WORKERS

In 1960, a group of workers separated from their international union and formed the Canadian Union of Operating Engineers and General Workers. That union was subsequently a founding member of a new national body, the Canadian Council of Unions in 1968. In 2003, they joined the Communication, Energy and Paper Union of Canada – itself the product of a merger between three unions that had broken away from their U.S.-based parent in the 1970s to move beyond the limits of American-style unionism.

In the thirty years before the last round of negotiations Local 2003 had many conflicts with their employer but no strikes. In this round of bargaining and especially as the implications of the financial crisis became more apparent, the local's demands were extremely modest. The corporation was obviously not looking for a settlement but a chance to break the



union and even before the lockout began, the union had filed a bad-faith bargaining charge against the corporation - a charge that the courts subsequently decided merited a labour board hearing. The local set aside any new demands and accepted the corporation's decision to outsource work, concentrating its bargaining on getting decent severance packages for those losing their jobs. The local of course rejected transferring existing work to lower-wage categories and the outrageous corporate demand for everyone to give up seniority and 're-apply' for their jobs.

While the union rejected the company agreement, it did not look to go on strike; it offered to keep working until a new agreement was reached. Cadillac Fairview wasn't however interested. As for the union's labour board complaint, the company's lawyers were able to get this put off until April 2010 (another example of the thin justice the law offers workers and a contrast to the speed with which companies get injunctions and bankers get government attention).

Once on the street, the local ran 24-hour picket lines for six months and then continued picketing Monday-Friday through the rest of the lockout. It organized some 15 solidarity rallies with folk and freedom singers including over 1000 supporters during the OFL Convention and a morning rush hour blockade. Knowing full well that the residents of the TD Centre in the heart of Bay Street were not going to respond sympathetically - the local organized a series of creative disruptions in the TD Centre - from launching huge banners and messages on helium balloons to parading through the crowds with giant grim reaper puppets and a daily barrage of air raid, ambulance, and police sirens. And with its limited resources, it spread its leafleting to other Cadillac properties.

THE SETTLEMENT

On February 26, 2010 - more than eight months after the lockout began - the national union, CEP, informed the workers that the company had come around to a bargained end to the dispute and that an agreement (details withheld) had been reached which would be voted on the following week. What got Cadillac Fairview to the table was first, the stubborn determination of the workers to continue fighting and keep the issue alive. Second, it was pretty obvious that the now approaching labour board hearings would concur that Cadillac Fairview had blatantly disregarded the province's labour laws. Though this was coming late in the day and a ruling restoring workers to their jobs seemed out of the question, the expected ruling and its publicity did put some pressure on the company to end the conflict.

That pressure was primarily manifested through the owner of Cadillac Fairview, the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. The Pension Plan administrators had been increasingly criticized for their anti-social investments on a number of fronts (from water privatization in Chile to investments in the arms trade) and so it was sensitive to the additional negative attention it would receive as the hearings proceeded. Reliable sources suggest that the Pension Plan administrators basically told Cadillac Fairview to settle before the April hearings.

The ratification meeting was held on March 5, 2010. Though a minority of the workers remained angrily opposed, a clear majority voted to accept it. This was not surprising. By then almost half the workers had other jobs and were not interested in returning. Others simply didn't want to work for Cadillac Fairview anymore and preferred to get a good severance package. Of those who did want the jobs again, few considered getting them back as being realistic at this stage. And the severance the corporation had been forced to offer was in fact quite significant: basically triple and in some cases more than four times the legislated minimums. The workers could therefore leave Cadillac Fairview with the dignity that comes with having taken on the fight, forced an insensitive corporation to retreat, and made - albeit qualified - gains.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

The failures of the labour movement didn't lie in any lack of sympathy for the Cadillac Fairview workers or unwillingness to demonstrate periodic support. The CEP continued to pay strike pay. The Teachers' unions publically expressed their anger and frustration at the involvement of 'their' pension fund in attacking Local 2003. The OFL highlighted the lockout at its convention and brought its delegates out to an impressive demonstration at the TD Centre. The Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYRLC) - one of the most progressive in the country if not on the continent - tried to generate further solidarity. And a small number of individual union activists regularly came down to the TD Centre to join the picket line.

None of this, however, spoke to the imbalance in power confronting a particular group of workers, the changing context in which workers are struggling, or to the serious implications of such conflicts for all workers. The movement seemed to be going through the traditional gestures of solidarity, rather than moving to the kind of creative and radical collective actions that might actually represent a *winning* strategy.

There was, for example, no clear determination on the part of CEP (perhaps overwhelmed by massive job losses and demands for concessions elsewhere) to make this struggle into a province-wide crusade against Cadillac Fairview, especially at a moment in time - the financial and housing crisis - when financiers and large developers were so discredited. Nor was there any strategic determination on the part of labour that the weak link was the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan and the consequent need to raise the stakes by joining with others also fighting the narrow use of the Plan to maximize returns (including dealing with the need, at a minimum, for workers to be able to block their pension money being used to break unions).

There was no tactical consideration given to how to overcome the media's disinterest in a struggle that was becoming invisible. This could only have been addressed with the kind of direct actions that the media couldn't ignore and the local couldn't pull off on its own - such as sit-ins backed by mass outside support, at the tenants of Cadillac Fairview that might be most sensitive to public opinion (like the TD Bank), or directly at the offices of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. Though Cadillac

Fairview could comfortably ride out the occasional protest, there was no plan for sustained and escalating tactics to get the message across that far from fading away, the conflict would be escalated and become increasingly prominent.

TOWARD CLASS-BASED STRUGGLES

The conflict revealed not only the fragility of union rights in the province and the weakness of one local going it alone, but pointed to a broader strategic failure in the labour movement. The crisis we've been experiencing is not only about plant closures, concessions and attacks on public sector workers and social programs; it's also about a crisis *within* the labour movement. The movement has been under attack for some three decades now and has emerged with lower expectations and a narrower sense of possibilities. That it was working people, rather than the economic elite, that is coming out of the Great Financial Crisis of 2008-10 on the defensive speaks volumes about the state of our movement. We have not come to grips with is that what we face isn't just a series of specific problems confronting particular workers, but an assault on workers as a class and the corresponding need for a class response.

What might this mean? To begin with, this is not just a Canadian problem: it is one facing workers everywhere. It goes far beyond 'bad leaders' and gets to the most difficult and intimidating questions. Not only do we need to figure out how to defend ourselves in a new context but – because defence is not enough (those with power will eventually wear you down) – how we simultaneously organize ourselves to transform a society that has become a barrier to human solidarity and progress.

History puts this in some perspective. In the 1930s, workers came to the conclusion that the main form of unionism then, craft-based unionism (which only organized skilled workers), was inadequate to what they faced. They essentially invented a new organizational form that brought all workers in a sector together: industrial unionism ('reinvented' might be the better term since such unionism had earlier roots, but it was only in these years that industrial unionism came into its own). Industrial unionism, including its extension to the public sector, was always limited by the fact that, while it brought groups of workers together, it didn't organize workers as a *class*. This didn't prevent workers from making major gains, especially when economic growth could be taken for granted and the fight was over the distribution of that growth. But once growth slowed down and in response corporations and governments became more aggressive, the limits of this form of organization were exposed.

The labour movement did not, however, move on to new forms and this is what must now be placed on the agenda. Fragmented as we are, we're sitting ducks. We need to develop new organizational forms that see workers as members of a larger class. Workers have interests that go far beyond their workplace - class is expressed in all aspects of our lives from the schools our children attend to the health care we receive to access to public transportation, to the environment. Moreover, those in the same boat as us are not just unionized workers but all those who don't have

capital to live off – non-union workers, the unemployed, new workers coming to Canada, the disabled and the poor.

It is not obvious what such new forms might be. But one such form – now being experimented with under the auspices of the [Greater Toronto Workers' Assembly](#) – tries to bring workers together on a class-based, community-rooted basis. This means gathering activists from across unions and community campaigns with the hope of linking up to other such formations that might subsequently be built in other cities and communities.

This does not mean that unions are irrelevant: unions continue to have a vital role and in the context of broader organizations like the Assembly, the relevance of unions can even be greater. But that can only happen if unions are themselves transformed. This is not just a matter of replacing leaders and introducing more radical rhetoric. If unions are to act to build class power, then everything about them will have to be changed. Unions will have to re-examine their priorities, and strategies, how they conduct strikes and campaigns, the focus of their research departments and the content of internal education. They will also need to rethink the relationships of leaders to their members and the depth of internal democracy, as well as links to other unions and potential allies in the community. And it means expanding customary visions of social justice to naming what we are fighting against – capitalism.

Experience suggests that few union leaders are ready to take on the risks and responsibilities this entails. It also suggests that on their own and in the face of economic uncertainties, rank-and-file workers are unlikely to develop the confidence to force such internal changes. Such revolutions inside unions can only happen through worker activists drawing strength from the creation of networks across workplaces (and across unions) and with support outside the unions. Part of the work of the new class organizations raised above is to facilitate and support such networks.

CONCLUSION

Looking back to the struggle at Cadillac Fairview, Steve Craig – the Chief Steward of the unit – concluded that “people need to realize that we do have power. Corporations need to feel the heat and workers need to crank it up.” The Cadillac Fairview struggle showed that groups of workers will and can fight but also that this is not enough. We need a new kind of labour movement that can amplify Craig's sentiments. If the left doesn't develop new organizational forms and strategies, corporations and states will exhaust the best in the working class and unions will drift toward simply accommodating to what they face – getting the best deal in the circumstances without challenging the 'circumstances' – while workers adjust their private lives, out of necessity, to individual survival. The status quo is disappearing as a choice. We will either make the leap into new forms of class mobilization or find ourselves continuing to slide into ever more ineffective stances to defend the gains of a receding past. **R**

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Flexibility or Insecurity: Struggles over Labour Standards in Ontario

An Interview with Mark Thomas

The pursuit of labour flexibility has been a central policy concern of neoliberalism. It has been central to rolling back wage demands, increasing precarious work and re-defining labour standards. These policies began to develop in Ontario in the second half of the NDP government of Bob Rae, but were really driven ahead by the Conservative governments of Mike Harris in the 1990s. The Liberal governments of Dalton McGuinty have done next to nothing to reverse them. Mark Thomas's important new book, *Regulating Flexibility: The Political Economy of Employment Standards* (McGill-Queens, 2009), examines the implementation of these policies in Ontario, and the various important community struggles that have formed around precarious work and labour standards. Mark is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at York University in Toronto. His research interests are in the areas of political economy and economic sociology, with a primary research focus on the regulation of labour standards at local, national, and transnational scales. He is also the co-editor (with Norene Pupo) of *Interrogating the New Economy: Restructuring Work in the 21st Century* (University of Toronto Press, 2010). Socialist Project asked Bryan Evans of Ryerson University, and himself a noted observer of Ontario politics, to interview Mark for *Relay* on his research and current struggles over labour market policies in Ontario.

SP: *Employment standards legislation is referred to as the "collective agreement of the unorganized."* It deals with such important and basic protections concerned with minimum wages, hours of work, vacation and holidays, equal pay for equal work and much more. You'd think there would be a tremendous amount of research on this subject but there isn't. What led you to this area?

MT: The project began while I was doing a PhD in Sociology at York University, where I now work. I was doing graduate course work on some of the topics that compel many graduate students who study political economy: trying to understand the dynamics of global capitalism, the impacts of neoliberalism, and also the ways in which social movements were organizing and trying to create progressive and democratic alternatives. To add a bit of context, this was the late 1990s, the time of Seattle, Quebec City. At the same time, the Harris government was in the process of making Ontario's economy more 'flexible' and competitive. This could mean a lot of things of course.

What it meant to Mike Harris and company during the Conservative governments of the 1990s in Ontario were things like reducing social assistance, making it harder to organize unions, and – to paraphrase a brief on the Employment Standards Act (ESA) produced by Parkdale Community Legal Services – “turning back the clock” on employment standards by setting the legislation back by 60 years. All in the name of ‘modernization,’ ‘competitiveness’ and ‘flexibility.’

What the Harris government was saying about flexibility and competitiveness struck me as a very local example of what was going on in so many other places. It seemed to me that what was going on with the ESA was indicative of broader attempts to restructure work. It was fundamentally connected to growing patterns of insecurity. So I started wondering what is happening to our economy when policymakers think ‘modernization’ means returning to employment standards of 60 years ago? What was all this stuff about ‘flexibility’? Flexible for who? What does that

actually mean when it is put into practice?

I also started talking to people who worked in some of the legal clinics around the city who dealt regularly with workers experiencing problems employment standards. Something quickly became very clear: employment standards legislation most definitely needed to be reformed – but most definitely not in the ways that were being proposed by Harris and friends.

I ended up writing *Regulating Flexibility* as an exploration of this context, these questions, and these contradictions. In it, I look at the historical development of employment standards legislation, putting what Harris was doing into historical context. I look at the ways in which ‘modern’ and ‘flexible’ employment standards actually mean a lowering of the floor in the labour market. And I look at the ways in which many are engaged in a process of trying to create better standards in the face of an ever-increasing situation of economic insecurity.

Social context is important. While the book focuses on the legislation, it suggests that what is going on with the return to the 60 hour work week, the problem of poor enforcement, a minimum wage that is below poverty level subsistence, and so on, is part of a much bigger picture. It is both a reflection of, and an important part of, the larger process of the restructuring of work, and in particular the growing phenomenon of precarious employment. The book argues that the ESA fails to provide necessary workplace protections in the contemporary labour market. In particular, as insecurity in the labour market has grown, the standards designed to establish a floor have weakened. And, at the same time, we can also see the ESA as a site of struggle, a space around which

forms of resistance to precarious employment and neoliberalism are emerging.

SP: A key conceptual contribution of your book is the idea that flexibilization is not deregulation but rather re-regulation by the market. Can you elaborate on this point and explain this new regulatory regime and how it emerged?

MT: While I focus on this term ‘labour flexibility’ in the book, really what we’re talking about is the neoliberal approach to labour market regulation. This is what is underlying government and corporate discourses of ‘flexibility’ that became so predominant in recent decades, particularly through the 1990s. So this question is then really about how we understand neoliberalism. Of course, one of the common claims that was made by proponents of neoliberal policies was that to create efficiency and competitiveness, governments needed to withdraw from regulating the economy. This was a direct attack on Keynesian approaches to social and economic policy. And certainly, when we look at the policy records of federal and provincial governments through the 1980s and 1990s, we can see examples of reduced government intervention, perhaps best illustrated through the dramatic cuts in government funding for social programs.

But when we look at labour market regulation we can see something slightly different. Certainly, substantial changes have been made at federal and provincial levels to labour market policies like (Un) Employment Insurance and various provincial labour relations acts. One way to understand these changes – whether they be in tightening the eligibility restrictions to limit the numbers of workers who qualify for EI, or in changing labour laws to make it harder to certify unions and easier to decertify – is to see them as a form of ‘deregulation’ where the state reduces the various kinds of workplace protections and labour rights.

Employment standards legislation was certainly caught up in this context. The clearest example from the Harris years in Ontario is the introduction of

what they called a form of ‘employee consent’ to enable the scheduling of 60 hour work weeks. What this meant was that an employer was required to go to an employee and get their consent in writing to schedule work hours more than 48 in a week. This replaced the system of government permits that existed prior. On its surface, this could look like an act of deregulation, as it reduces the government’s role in regulating work time. But when we look closely at what is going on, we can see that it’s not so simple as that. First, there is still legislation that regulates work time. It just changes the way that happens to some extent, by putting the process more directly in the hands of employers and workers. So in this sense the term re-regulation is more appropriate.

But more fundamentally, actions like this, which took place in all kinds of forms through neoliberal labour market policies, are based not on an absence of regulation but on a system of labour market regulation that is more directly determined by market forces. While on its surface, it may appear that the ‘employee consent’ arrangements put the regulation of work time in the hands of workers and employers, really this is an arrangement that is shaped by the power relationships of the capitalist workplace. In cases where the ESA is most likely to apply, particularly non-unionized workplaces, this kind of arrangement further enhances the power of employers to control conditions of work.

A good example that illustrates how this played out was with Toyota, which produces cars in Cambridge, Ontario. Once the new law came into place, they altered their job applications to include a statement asking applicants if they are willing to work 60 hours per week. So ‘consent’ to a 60 hour work week starts before you even get a job. And you can imagine what happened to all those applications that had ‘no’ as an answer to that question. This is how the ‘consent’ process works. So again, re-regulation to create greater exposure to market forces.

This term ‘flexibility’ is an important one to all of this. To quote a document called *Time for Change*, which outlined

the need for ESA reform: “The workplaces and workers of Ontario are flexible, modern and adaptable. Employment standards legislation should be equally so. This of course could mean a lot of things. What’s not to agree with? But while it’s just a word, it matters a lot because it serves to frame the whole process. This discourse of ‘flexibility’ hides insecurity. It hides working overtime and not being paid for it. It hides being afraid to complain about working conditions because of a temporary residency permit that’s tied to a job, where a complaint could lead to being fired and deported. In the book I try to take that seemingly innocent word apart and connect it to these particular sets of power relations that are produced through neoliberal re-regulation. So I look at how ‘flexibility’ was used to justify things like the 60 hour work week, the 9-year freeze on the minimum wage, and cutbacks in the numbers of ESA inspectors.

Really, what we see in these kinds of policies is not an absence of labour market regulation, as the term ‘deregulation’ would imply, but a new kind of regulation, one places much more power in the hands of employers. In the end, what is happening is that through these kinds of policies, the state is acting to heighten the commodification of labour power.

SP: The Common Sense Revolutionaries have been out of office for nearly seven years now. The McGuinty Liberal government in Ontario has not sought to roll-back all of the anti-union and anti-worker changes brought in by Harris. Why are the Liberals apparently reluctant to take this on?

MT: Understanding the history of employment standards is important. When we look at these questions from an historical perspective, we can get a better understanding of what is really going on through successive governments.

If you look at the record of Liberal governments over the past several decades, whether they be provincial or federal, it’s not surprising that McGuinty’s government has made few

fundamental changes to the anti-labour legislation of the Harris era. On the surface, they have taken some steps. With the ESA, probably the most notable was ending the minimum wage freeze. This had been in place for nine years, from 1995 to 2004! So the Liberals reintroduced the pattern of incremental increases that had been common prior to Harris. But this example shows the true colour of the Liberal approach to employment standards. In lifting the freeze, they did not address the fundamental problem of the need for a living wage, one that enables people to live above poverty level subsistence. Their wage increases, which have taken the minimum wage to \$9.50 today (and to \$10.25 as of 31 March 2010), don't even come close to what anti-poverty researchers and activists have been calling for. So while they have made a small improvement to a really bad situation, the fundamental problem persists.

This has been the general approach they have taken when it comes to Harris' changes to the ESA. Another example is the 60-hour work week. In 2004, they proclaimed they 'ended' it. What happened was they simply changed the rules around the 60 hour work week by reintroducing the permit system that requires employers to get a government

permit when they want to schedule a 60 hours. So really all they did was brought back a government permit system that had existed with the ESA up until 2001 and that was easily accessed by employers prior to Harris getting rid of it.

Overall, when we look at the actions of the Harris and McGuinty governments, we need to recognize a couple of things. First, the ESA was insufficient and ineffective long before the Harris reforms. What happened in recent years was, in part, that poor standards became increasingly normalized as a result of what Harris did through things like the minimum wage freeze and the introduction of the 60-hour work week. But looking at these historically, rather than see these as new conditions within employment standards, we can see that things like the insufficient minimum wage and the 'flexible' approach to excessive hours of work are longstanding problems. So in modifying some of the harshest conditions imposed by Harris, the Liberal approach to the ESA nonetheless reflects longstanding patterns of 'flexibility' that have been present in the standards.

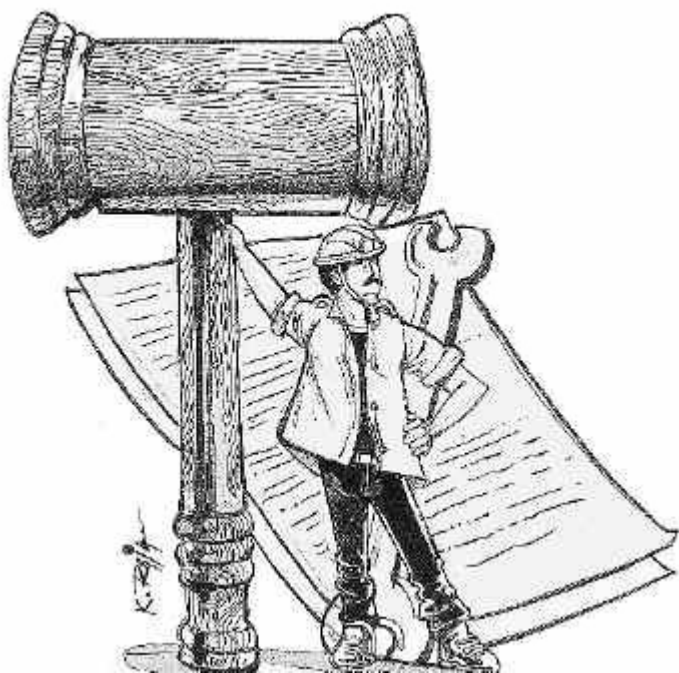
Of course, another part to the answer as to why McGuinty's Liberals haven't really rolled back the anti-labour reforms

of the Harris era is that in some ways they don't really oppose those measures. So to get them to change things would require creating a great deal of sustained pressure.

SP: One recent change the Liberals have introduced is an amendment to the ESA regulating temporary work agencies. What is your assessment of this?

MT: In May 2009, the Ontario Government passed Bill 139, The Employment Standards Amendment Act (Temporary Help Agencies). The Bill contained provisions to: reduce barriers to permanent work for temporary agency workers; prohibit fees charged to workers by temporary assignment agencies for finding employment and for services like resume writing and interview preparation; ensure that employees have information about their assignment such as pay schedule and job description; and require agencies to give workers information about their rights under the ESA. The government also enacted a regulation to ensure that temporary agency workers have equal rights to holiday pay.

This bill came on the heels of a major campaign by the Workers Action Centre to push for better regulations regarding temporary help agencies. It is a step forward in that it expands the scope of the ESA to cover workers in temporary agencies in several key ways. This is important because securing coverage is a step toward improving working conditions amongst those in very precarious work environments. But it is only one step of many that need to be taken. Like all aspects of the ESA, the key to this bill lies in the extent to which it will be enforced. Will the Ministry of Labour conduct inspections of workplaces that are major employers of temporary agency workers? Will violations be met with appropriate penalties? Will these workers be left to file complaints on their own? If everything is left to individual workers, then it is likely that there will be many violations that will go unreported because the reality is that workers in these employment relationships are often fearful that they will lose their job if they complain. That's always been the case with the ESA. At



this point, it's still very early to begin to determine what difference this bill may make.

On the positive side, if this gain can be used as an organizing tool, as a way to bring workers in temporary agencies together to discuss their conditions of work and organize to improve things in more collective ways (like to get the legislation enforced) then that will definitely be important. So the bill could create the conditions for more organizing by creating a mechanism of accountability against which to measure employers and the state.

SP: The Ontario Ministry of Labour has become a rather passive, even quiet political institution. What larger political and economic forces do you attribute this to? Is this a reflection of the state of class resistance?

MT: While the Ministry has certainly gone through phases of greater activity, I'm not sure I see the current situation as just about it being in an overly passive phase. When it comes to employment standards, I think we need to see the Ministry as part of the overall regulatory regime. The primary mechanism of enforcement of the ESA is 'self-reliance.' This goes back to the inception of the legislation and what it means is that enforcement begins with individual employees and employers. Both are expected to make themselves aware of the legislation. Employers are expected to respect it and employees are expected to complain to the Ministry when things go wrong. Other proactive forms of enforcement, such as targeted inspections of problem industries, are a secondary line of defense. And this is one of the major problems with the ESA. It places the burden of enforcement on an individual employee. If you don't complain, most problems will go undetected. And many are reluctant to complain out of fear of repercussion. This is why the vast majority of employment standards complaints are filed after a worker is no longer employed by the employer who violated the law.

This is a part of the various kinds of 'flexibility' that are built into the ESA.

Employers gain 'flexibility' in standards through poor enforcement, which takes the form of insufficient workplace inspections, an individualization of the complaints process, and an overall emphasis on 'self-reliance' that places onus to enforce the ESA on individual workers.

Of course, budget cuts during the Harris years had a big impact on the capacities of the Ministry. There were significant reductions in staff size and in the numbers of proactive inspections. The Liberals have taken steps to increase these in recent years. But, as in the minimum wage and working time regulations, they have not gone nearly as far as they should.

SP: A key aspect of your research on Ontario is picking up on themes in Marx – on labour markets, struggles over work-time and work controls. These are part of the key points of difference with neoliberal and institutionalist analyses of the labour market. How did these link to your study of Ontario labour market policies?

MT: In my research, I've tried to account for the various social forces and actors that have shaped the development of employment standards. These include trade unions, employers associations, policymakers within the state, and workers' and community organizations outside organized labour. All have played an important role, though of course given the balance of class forces we can see that the legislation was ultimately shaped in ways that met the interests of employers. But that is not to discount the gains that have been made in creating a legislative floor through employment standards. So I've tried to look at the ESA itself as a site of struggle and then illustrate the ways in which various competing interests have influenced legislative developments. In other words, I try to show how the legislation we know as the ESA, while a dense legal text, is produced by people, and often in struggle. This is significant because we need to recognize that it didn't just happen; it was made. And because it was made, it can be re-made.

The late 1990s is a period where some major dynamics were played out

with the advance of neoliberalism through the Harris government. While the ESA was always weak, they really sought to unravel what little was there even further, through reforms like I've just mentioned. While some resistance emerged through labour and community organizations, as we know this was a hard time for left organizing, and a very explicitly employer-oriented agenda was pushed through. But since that time, there have been pockets of resistance emerging through particular issues and campaigns. For example, some auto workers at Toyota used the ESA complaints process as part of a resistance to that company's imposition of the 60 hour work week. And more recently, we've seen campaigns emerging to push for the expansion of the ESA coverage to groups of workers in the most precarious forms of employment, like those in temporary help agencies in the live-in caregivers program. So these dynamics of organizing – whether by employers or workers – are constantly influencing the legislation. Of course, the state is a key player in this mix, and not as some kind of neutral arbitrator. When we look at the history of the evolution of the ESA, we can clearly see that the way the legislation has been developed in ways that generally favored business interests. The balance of class forces in particular periods shapes the degree to which this happens.

SP: Mark, following on some of the themes of your book on the growth of precarious work and the drive for increased labour flexibility in Ontario, what do you see as the coming trends in the labour market and struggles over work conditions that follow from your analysis? What are you finding in terms of the impact of the financial crisis?

MT: Certainly the current context has really heightened the pressures that shape struggles around employment standards. On the one hand, as the crisis hit we saw actions by the corporate sector to downsize workforces and increase precariousness. We also heard from governments about the need to enhance competitiveness, with the implication that some of the ways this could be achieved would be by

downsizing, wage freezes, etc. In terms of the ESA, in early 2009, the McGuinty government raised the possibility that the minimum wage increase scheduled for March 2010 could be cancelled. So from one side, the crisis really enhanced the pressures to further introduce forms of ‘labour flexibility’ that could exacerbate conditions of labour market polarization and insecurity.

But in this same context, we’ve seen organizing amongst groups of workers who are pushing to resist this increasing precariousness. In particular, two recent workers’ campaigns helped to shaped two new pieces of legislation have been introduced to address conditions of precarious employment. I’m thinking of the temporary agencies bill and a new live-in caregivers bill, both of which offer some improvements for these groups of workers, though neither goes nearly far enough. But what we can see is that in this context, while it has really put workers on the defensive, there are sites where people continue to push for better standards.



SP: What are the kinds of union and workers’ struggles you see going on today that would address precarious work? Are there differences you see that are important right now in terms of private sector, say at the conflict at the TD Bank in Toronto, versus public sector struggles, as say occurred this summer in the cities of Windsor and Toronto and through the winter at the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa?

MT: We can see a difference between public and private sector struggles as reflected in the nature of the demands made by employers and employees, for example unpaid overtime in the banks versus concerns over privatization, contracting out in municipal work forces. But, despite these particular differences, we can see all of these as reflective of broader trends of insecure employment and aggressive employers seeking to assert control through concessions and lowering standards. In all cases, workers are put on the defensive to protect basic standards (like the right to overtime pay) or longstanding benefits. But as I said, despite the challenges of the current context, we can still see growing pressure from workers to resist increasing precariousness and this is likely to continue, in particular as we move out of recession into some form of economic ‘recovery’. In terms of struggles around the ESA, I see this happening in areas related to the need to extend legislative coverage to broader categories of employment, and to create effective enforcement practices for the Act overall, in particular for the new bills for temp agency workers and caregivers.

SP: Periods of major political gains and setbacks by workers’ in workplaces and collective bargaining are linked to the broader political context and state of the Left. This is, of course, part of the classic Marxist distinction between trade union and political struggles. How do you read the current setting in Ontario and where are you finding some positive new initiatives emerging? How do you see this in terms of the various community-labour forums that seem to be emerging across North America?

MT: When looking at the example of employment standards, we can see a glimpse into some of this. The ESA is made by policymakers. But the legislation is always contested. Organizations like the Workers Action Centre, the Caregivers Action Centre, Parkdale Community Legal Services, and the community legal clinics around the city of Toronto are part of the ongoing struggles to repair, reshape, and reform employment standards, whether through developing strategies to create better enforcement practices, or to extend the coverage to many different groups of workers who have been or are still exempt. I’ve mentioned the temporary agencies bill as an example of this. We can also see the recent expansion of the caregivers’ legislation as a partial result of some very active an ongoing organizing campaigns. These are community-based organizations that are working amongst recent immigrants and workers from racialized groups, who are often outside the parameters of organized labour. And they are dealing with some of the most pressing issues when it comes to precarious employment. In terms of organized labour, supporting and engaging in this kind of organizing work through community-labour alliances is essential to broaden the base of working class resistance to neoliberalism and precarious employment. **R**

Crisis and Social Revolt: The North American Left Sputters

Greg Albo

In a context already marked by food and energy crises, global capitalism has been enmeshed in a financial and economic crisis since 2007. Even as tentative signs of recovery appear in 2010, the impacts of the financial dislocation are going to be long-lasting. The crisis has raised the delegitimation of neoliberalism as an ideological defence of capitalist free markets and policy framework for states. Business and government elites are doing everything they can to reconstruct the neoliberal project.

The cracks in neoliberalism over the course of the crisis would seem to provide the opportunity for a new correlation of social forces to emerge and an alternate development model to be posed. But it is anything but clear that these are unfolding. A series of revolts have erupted over the last few years – sporadic rioting and occupations across the capitalist world and general strikes in France and Greece in the early phases of the crisis and more recent public sector and general strikes in Ireland, Portugal and Greece. However, this social turmoil has often remained relatively isolated and sporadic in Europe, growing in pockets of Africa, and all but non-existent across Asia and elsewhere. In North America, there has been almost a sense of working class resignation after the Obama election demobilization, the defeats and concessions of the UAW and CAW at the hands of GM and the auto companies, and the inability to form a mass movement around foreclosures and housing beyond defensive actions of civil disobedience.

This rather mixed political landscape led the French socialist journal, *Actuel Marx* (Numéro 47, “Crises, révoltes, résignations,” Avril 2010 at netx.u-paris10.fr/actuelmarx), to ask a number of historians, sociologists, philosophers and social movement actors their assessment of recent developments. What are the social mediations and power structures that seem to be containing the crisis and that are, instead, impeding collective mobilization? Can the weakness of social struggles be explained by the effects of neoliberalism and its crisis? Under what conditions might the political dynamics of revolts extend beyond their own spontaneity? The interview with Greg Albo, professor of Political Economy at York University, is presented here.

In your area, what state are social struggles in? What are their specific forms?

To assess the state of current social struggles in North America, we need to begin with the crisis and what has been its character and social form. Although the crisis has brought a major shock to economic growth, the patterns of uneven development characteristic of the neoliberal period have been remarkably re-

silient. Several central imbalances remain in place: between zones of structural trade surpluses and deficits; between growing productive capacity and the distribution of purchasing power; between fiscal demands on states and taxation levels; between the levels of indebtedness of working class people and income flows to meet interest payments (from employment but also from collapsing house prices and pension values); and between the volume of credit claims in financial markets and the amount of value being created in the productive economy.

In this setting, several possible scenarios need to be kept in mind. If, for example, the emergency credit and state supports to bridge the imbalances stop being provided too early, the rapid realignment would likely reinforce the economic crisis. This would raise the panic amongst capitalists seen across 2008, and this would be the so-called ‘double-dip’ recession. In such a double-dip, it is not impossible that a potential catastrophic turn in the crisis could ensue, with a radical destruction of capital values to rebalance these relations. The government authorities would, of course, attempt to bring a halt to such a spiral, but it would much more difficult to reverse. The decision to not quickly reverse fiscal stimulus and monetary policy so far in 2010 suggests that this remains a real concern.

A second plausible scenario is a prolonged period of stagnation. The economic imbalances prove quite intractable within the context of the current deflation, with private sector investment failing to pick up, and thus government deficits persisting. Indeed, most economic actors and zones of the world remain committed to their current strategies and invested capital (such as East Asian and German export strategies, finance capital opposition to taxation and regulatory reform, manufacturing and governments and service sector companies preferring to cut wages and extend precarious work). In this case, as long as credit is being provided, the imbalances persist, the capital is turned over and the economy stabilizes with the space provided by the emergency policy measures. But the blockages to sustained accumulation also remain in place. A period of prolonged stagnation might then unfold as past investments and debt obligations cannot be completely shed and thus a new basis for new accumulation established. As seen in last G20 meetings, and the most recent IMF outlooks on the world economy, this possibility, too, cannot be completely discounted, even after a few quarters of stronger growth.

There is also another possibility, and this one must be taken most seriously as it what governments – especially those in North America – are attempting and how current class struggles are being shaped. In terms of imbalances, there are now attempts to coordinate a measure of rebalancing, particularly between East Asia and the U.S. via raising American savings rates and Chinese

consumption levels, and this will become the focus of the G20 meetings this summer. It is likely that the economic authorities will do everything possible to continue to socialize the risks generated in financial markets and the bad debt of banks inside the states into very long debt structures. As well, the economic authorities forge new institutional mechanisms to oversee financial markets and re-establish demand conditions without altering the fundamental role that finance and credit have played over the period of neoliberalism. Instead of adjusting financial markets or reversing neoliberal tax shifts, the central capitalist states are focused on having the working classes bear the brunt of these efforts through reduced wages, pensions, services, and regressive taxes.

It needs also to be acknowledged that the rollbacks to workers in the auto, steel, rubber, and electronics sectors is allowing space for renewed workplace re-organization. With the political defeat of the unions in these sectors, the conditions to extract value from workers have improved, at the same time that there is a significant devalorisation of the oldest vintages of the capital stock. In this scenario, accumulation might well pick up, as long as effective demand also revives and the imbalances are improved. But it also cannot be ruled out that the imbalances are again reproduced in new forms, and neoliberalism has pulled this trick several times since the early 1980s. It cannot be ruled out. But if the underlying sources of the imbalances remain, credit has to start flowing again at a rapid clip, and a new bout of financial speculation is all but unavoidable, and a new phase of neoliberalism evolves. This is what ensued after the 1980s savings and loans crisis, the 1990s Asian crisis and the 1990s dot.com meltdown, and it would be foolish to rule out such a prospect after the sub-prime mortgage explosion.

In all these scenarios, the balance of class forces of 'late neoliberalism' has appeared strikingly resilient. The union and social movements in Canada, Quebec and the U.S. do not support these measures, of course, given their class content. But neither have any of these movements been able – or even much in the way of attempted – to mobilize an opposition to it. Indeed, given their state of disorganization and demobilization, they fear even worse.

This is not to say that different levels of class conflict will not occur. Yet through the course of the crisis it is difficult to identify the modes or sites in which the workers' and social movement are beginning to demonstrate the ingenuity that might reverse their decline and set an agenda of opposition to having workers pay for the crisis rather than the bankers and speculators.

The high points of political opposition remain the varied general strikes that erupted in Quebec, Ontario and B.C. against neoliberalism in the 1990s, the anti-globalization movement in Seattle a decade ago now, and the electoral mobilization for the Obama presidential candidacy. Sporadic forms of resistance to neoliberalism have continued to emerge across the financial crisis, most vividly seen in housing squats and takebacks in the U.S., and scattered factory occupations across the 'rustbelt' of the U.S. and Canada. But it needs to be recorded that a new anti-neoliberal

movement has failed to emerge. The leadership of the North American union movement seems barely conscious of the need to set itself on a radical course of organizational and political renewal.

What is the impact of the financial and economic crises on these struggles? Are there new struggles because of the crisis? Have they taken a specific orientation? Have you noticed any confluence?

Without a major organized political reaction from the union and social movements, the economic recovery is stumbling along in North America: further financial market collapse has been blocked, demand is stabilizing, industrial profits appear to be recovering and last quarter growth for 2009 exceeded all expectations. However, all this is coming with more authoritarian political relations within the state and especially within workplaces – authoritarian tendencies that have been implicit in neoliberalism from the outset. The lesson learned by many sections of the North American ruling classes has not been one of market failures, but the possibility to even further re-write collective agreements and to find new ways to prop up the neoliberal state. Rather than witnessing a shift in the balance of class forces toward workers and popular movements, the course of the crisis has favoured the capitalist classes.

In the failure to invent new political forms in the course of building opposition to neoliberalism, the worst features of the inherited forms of political opposition have been reinforced – the reassertion of 'business unionism' and the vulgar lobbying of legislators for subsidies or narrow changes to legislation as the focus of political work for examples – across North America. In a word, social struggles in Canada and the U.S. are in a terrible state. They are having difficulty fighting back existing demands for concessions and wage austerity, after the cave-ins by the UAW and CAW in the auto sector; and they are far from adequately organized for the coming battle over public sector cutbacks as government 'exit strategies' start to fall in place. The social movements (particularly around health care and ecology) and unions (notably in the auto and educational sectors) are waging purely defensive battles, often in the process conceding major ideological and political ground. The disorganization of workers, social movements and the Left has been a central objective of neoliberalism from its beginnings. It has hard not to see renewed impetus to this strategy by governments and corporations.

It is a combination of anger and frustration that lies behind the spontaneous outburst of direct action amongst housing and poverty activists (in Miami, Vancouver, the Great Lakes region, in particular) and among shopfloor workers (Republic Windows workers occupation in Chicago, the Ford UAW workers' rejection of further concessions, or the sustained strike of miners in Sudbury or locked-out service workers at Cadillac Fairview in Toronto).

There is also a growing realization among more and more grassroots activists and shopfloor militants that things must change and new political alliances and forms of organization explored.

The social coalitions, social forums and network politics, that have substituted for organizational-building in North America for some thirty years now, has not provided the political resources to challenge neoliberal modes of rule even in the midst of the most severe crisis of capitalism in seventy years. Anarchist politics, and its cognate in autonomist Marxism, still appeal to those who see localist strategies as responses to the dislocations of neoliberalism. They have clearly lost their appeal, as the events of the crisis have so clearly shown the concentrated power of capital and state cannot be evaded by alternate communities or struggled over in the search for an anti-neoliberal politics. The beginning probing for new organizational poles, explicitly anti-capitalist and more politically ambitious, can be seen in dissident groups of autoworkers and teachers, in the Palestine solidarity movement, in migrant rights organizing, in the multiplication of reading groups on *Capital*, in the shedding of the legacies of 1917 and so forth. These are the most hopeful signs we have seen in a generation.

The crisis we are experiencing is very serious and has world-wide dimension Yet, we do not notice any grand resistance movement against the social forces that have led us to this situation. How do you interpret that?

A number of structural transformations over the period of neoliberalism have altered the organizational foundations for Left politics: the changes in the nature of employment toward more networked production processes and fragmented services provision; the increasing international circulation of capital; the internal differentiation and stratification of the working class; and the eclipse of so many of the cultural and political resources of working class communities. The Left has suffered major historical defeats, for good and ill, in the end of authoritarian communism and the realignment of social democracy with the ideological embrace of much the neoliberal critique of the state in favour of market processes, and acceptance of neoliberal distributional relations. With the fragile political space that the Left has historically occupied in North America, this has been an especially marginalizing set of experiences.

These developments have undermined working class capacities in terms of workplace organization, political leadership of oppositional forces and ideological inventiveness. As a consequence, for more than two decades, Left politics has oscillated between extremes. On the one hand, a 'politics of chaos,' under a blended leadership of autonomists, anarchists and the social left, all committed *a priori* to 'horizontalism,' loose organizational practices in encompassing coalitions, and anti-power, anti-party politics. This stance has dominated social movements. As much as anything else, this politics reflects the disarray of Left forces. It is small size, concentrated in urban centres and is unable to challenge state power apart from efforts to combat particular initiatives being forwarded by neoliberals. On the other, short-term political calculation to avoid further social erosion has come to dominate unions and large social organizations, a notable case being the large North American environmental groups. They have often reduced their politics to the vulgar level of negotiating with the state within the policy terms of neoliberalism.

In the brief moment these varied organizational tendencies came together to fight globalization, it seemed a new period of Left organizational creativity might unfold. Instead, the events of 9/11 and the economic slowdown from 2001 reinforced divisions. Both the social movements and the unions, and even more so the remnants of the organized radical Left, were driven into a further spiral of defeat and organizational setbacks. In Canada, where efforts to form new radical political capacities were launched, and a long history of forming important social coalitions existed between unions and community groups, the political terrain for the Left became rather barren (except for some solidarity work around Palestine and the unique case of Quebec Solidaire). The story is somewhat different for the U.S., but the outcome is much the same (with some successes in community organizing in the big cities and the various mobilizations of Latinos and other large immigrant groups).

Thus, apart from episodic demonstrations, annual social justice fairs, the day-to-day work of unions and activist civic organizations, there exist few organizational nodes that might provide the foundation for an anti-neoliberal alliance to emerge to organize mass struggles over the course of the crisis. Nor is there anything like an organized radical Left forming, grounded in socialism and Marxism, with a developing political practice that might animate building such fightbacks.

In day-to-day struggles, as well as the big political issues of the day, the North American capitalist classes have had their way in defining the features of the crisis, policies for limiting the damage to their property and rule and the terms for who will pay for the crisis in the 'exit strategies.' The beginning battles over public sector cuts – already dramatically unfolding in California and in a number of urban centres in North America – will test whether the developing recognition to experiment organizationally will crystallize into new community-based class struggle organizations.

What is the effect of these struggles (or of their absence) on the politics put forward to counter the crisis? Are these politics haunted by the prospect of a revolt or, on the contrary, do they underestimate it?

The failure political resistance to emerge on a mass scale to date leads to a number of points – points that are severe on political optimism at this moment but necessarily realistic from where the Left must begin. First, as far as North America is concerned, it is far too early to proclaim that neoliberalism has come to an end. As an ideology of 'free markets,' the financial crisis has thor-

There has been no significant disunity amongst the main fraction of capital They have all seen their political stake in the resolution of the crisis in a way which reconstitutes neoliberal hegemony.

oughly discredited it, and many of its' administrative principles have broken down. Remarkably, finance capital seems to have emerged politically still at the centre of power through the crisis, and the distributional norms of social polarisation and wages lagging productivity advances neoliberalism seem to not be not just resilient but being intensified. A most striking feature of the fierce debates about how to address the financial crisis has been the way the manufacturing capital in North America, although undergoing profound restructuring in the auto, electronics, pulp and paper and steel sectors, has offered no policy alternative to the strategies of Wall Street and Bay Street. There is a measure of political dissent in Ottawa and Washington amongst the New Democratic Party and the Democrats. But at this point, it is pure fantasy to see significant cracks in neoliberal hegemony, under the political leadership of finance capital, that might reshape the political terrain.

Second, the power of the capitalist state is being used to contain the crisis, kick-start accumulation, and underwrite a credit expansion and the economic imbalances of neoliberalism in a new form. The political and policy effort – by conservative, liberal and social democratic governments at the national and subnational levels in Canada, Quebec and the U.S. – is concentrated on reconstructing the neoliberal political project. The Federal Budget just released this March in Canada, and the provincial budgets that followed, have been most revealing of these intentions.

Third, it is quite conceivable that rather than shaking the confidence of the ruling classes, the lack of political resistance is widening the political and policy space for them to pursue their ambitions more aggressively. We may well enter a more authoritarian phase of neoliberalism. The ghosts of the revolts of the 1960s and 1970s that have always haunted neoliberalism remain a real presence. This is less in the threat that they pose today than in the stiffening of the determination of the ruling classes to resolve the crisis on their own terms.

Fourth, the exit strategies being proposed so far all have the working classes paying for the crisis, particularly via increases in payroll taxes on wages and consumption taxes, wage austerity and lowered pensions and public services. This is a very aggressive, militant and confident strategy being put forward by the ruling classes. Alongside the intensification of work, these basic 'economistic' issues of social class will be a central area of political conflict in the next few years, and they will increasingly intersect the political struggles over race, gender and migration.

With the crisis have you noticed any new rivalry amongst the dominant classes? Or are they between other social groups? At an international level? Do you think that the food and ecological crisis could be more federative?

Competitive rivalries within and between national capitalist classes are always a feature of capitalism in every epoch. So are forms of political and economic co-ordination, which become increasingly important as the socialization of capital increases and the world market deepens. The state plays an increasing role

not in opposition to markets nor in developing its own autonomous role, but in continually evolving new strategies and tactics to provide the political conditions for capital accumulation.

Similarly, geopolitical co-ordination evolves as capital internationalizes and states become increasingly inter-penetrated, fundamentally altering the political alliances in national power blocs. The management of this crisis has shown a key feature of contemporary imperialism. Even in the context of acute geopolitical rivalries, and intensifying international competition over the production and distribution of new value and where the burden of financial losses will be spatially displaced, new forms of coordination could materialize beyond the capitalist core of the G8 group of countries, but also to expand, on the one hand, to the G20 group, and, on the other, to form new bilateral operational modes between China and the U.S., the two central actors in the world market.

The political consequence of all this needs to be registered: there has been no significant disunity amongst the main fraction of capital – between industrial capital and finance, between foreign and internal (national) capital, and between big and small capitals. They have all seen their political stake in the resolution of the crisis in a way which reconstitutes neoliberal hegemony. This is remarkable given what we know of the history of major crises in the past. The North American Left needs to come to grips with it. Partly for what it says about the current political struggle and the dashed expectation that has forever plagued the Left that economic crises are necessarily moments of political advance. And partly for what it says about the perpetual and ever elusive search for a progressive wing of the capitalist classes to align with – a dubious heritage of the North American communist parties and a defining attribute of the NDP in Canada and left Democrats in the United States.

In this context, the socialist Left in North America must be actively fostering the formation of new political agencies. One necessary aspect of such an engagement is class reformation through revitalization of unions, and the linking of unions to workers in new sectors, the struggles for gender and racial equality, and the marginalized outside 'normal' work processes. A second is actively experimenting in organizational convergence between the remnants of the independent Left, social movements, and the sections within social democracy that remained committed to a transformative project. Third, these organizational developments need to be grounded in the building up of educational, communicative and cultural resources. This is indispensable to forming the political identity necessary for a 'new socialism' for the 21st century. Finally, the wage and work concessions being demanded in workplaces and the public cutbacks being discussed in the various 'exit strategies' provide a huge opening for political struggle and a programme for forging new alliances.

The realism about the current setting needs to meet the optimism of what is possible in building a post-neoliberal order and an anti-capitalist political movement in North America. The financial crisis has demonstrated all too vividly that this project is now an imperative. **R**

Copenhagen and Carbon Trading: Why the commodification of Nature will not solve climate change

Mary Thibodeau

As the Yes Men hoax of the Copenhagen negotiations and environmental justice movements expose Canada's shameful position on climate change, we are faced with many possible takes on the climate change issue. The Yes Men hoax illuminated Canadian inaction through a fake Environment Canada press release stating that Canada is "taking the long view on the world economy" and reversing its previous woefully inadequate positions on climate change, thereby acknowledging the need to take full responsibility for emissions. Later it emerged that Canada was not, in fact, acknowledging its climate debt to poor nations, and that tar-sand development would continue on as usual. As climate justice movements and the climate debt agents mobilized around the indebtedness issue, others saw 'hope' in Obama's presence at the negotiations.

Many of us were intrigued by the willingness of the United States to participate in this most recent round of climate negotiations and pressed for a meaningful agreement to come out of Copenhagen. Still others were shocked by Canada's placement as 'second to last' in the climate change performance index and are calling on the Harper government to fulfill its Kyoto obligations. However, it appears that the mere push to fulfill Kyoto obligations will not be enough to get us out of the climate peril. That is, when the Kyoto Protocol is examined more closely its 'business friendly' flexible mechanisms reveal new forms of accumulation and enclosure of the biosphere, and the legitimization of a reliance on fossil fuels.

FROM CHICAGO TO KYOTO: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CARBON MARKETS

It was not too long ago that the issue of whether global warming was occurring at all, and whether humans had anything to do with the phenomenon was up for debate. In 1988 the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) organized the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), to study the scientific, political and economic information surrounding the risks of climate change due to anthropogenic influences. With the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), negotiated at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the need to address the problem of climate change with a political response was formally acknowledged. The convention called on countries to reduce dangerous greenhouse gas emissions with an acceptance of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities."¹ This idea of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' appeared to acknowledge a greater responsibility for rich countries to take action for their unequal consumption of the world's resources. Whilst the convention encouraged these ac-

tions, it was not until the development of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 that signatories were obliged to take action to reduce their emissions by 5.2% from 1990 levels for the commitment period of 2008-12. At this time, many of the goals of the UNFCCC also became more market-based and flexible.

The Kyoto Protocol allows for countries that are unable to meet their targets through national measures, to use 'flexible' market mechanisms to gain more leverage in how (or if) they attain their reduced emission goals. These flexible mechanisms enable countries to meet their targets in the most 'cost effective' manner, and include 'Emissions Trading,' 'Joint Implementation,' and the 'Clean Development Mechanism.' Emissions Trading began to be discussed within the context of international climate change negotiations with the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the establishment of an International Emissions Trading Association (IETA). However, it was not until the mid-90s that discussions surrounding formalizing emissions trading into practice really began to occur.

The growth of carbon markets has accompanied the growth in uncertainty markets from the 1970s and beyond, with financialization gaining momentum at the same time as a growing environmental consciousness and concern over the climate crisis. Governments, financial interests and energy faced environmentalist opposition, and sought out a neoliberal, market-based 'compromise' in the form of a commodified fix to the problem of global warming.² The popular approach to the problem of global warming became the "project of building a single, liquid global carbon market worth many trillions of dollars – backed by the UN, national governments, economists, environmentalists and many in the business sector."³ However, it was not until 1997 with the successful lobbying of the Clinton Administration and the example of United States programs for trading in sulphur dioxide that emissions trading came to be on the agenda of the Kyoto Protocol. With the help of Al Gore and his *Generation Investment Company*, carbon trading and offsets became a popular response to the problem of climate change.⁴

With the Kyoto Protocol, polluter countries that have agreed to emission targets are given emission credits, which are equivalent to their reduction commitments from 1990 levels. Credit quotas are then distributed nationally through 'grandfather' clauses, which allow the biggest polluters to receive the largest allocation of credits. If the polluter does not use the entire pollution credit quota, they can either 'bank' the credits for the future or sell the credits on the open market to be purchased by another polluter. In contrast, if they use up all their credits, they must purchase more from a polluting country that has not used up its

full allocation, or invest in projects in other countries through either Joint Implementation (JI) or the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

Emission trading entails the creation of a carbon market which allows countries with emission credits to spare (such as Iceland) to sell them to countries unable to meet their targets (such as Canada). Credit is transferred for emission reductions accumulated through projects to form ‘units,’ which are equivalent to one tonne of CO₂. Units can take the form of a Removal Unit (RMU), or the generation of a unit from the ‘absorption’ of carbon through re-forestation projects or land-use changes. This is accomplished through the use of ‘sinks’ in the form of trees, soils, or oceans for the absorption of carbon. In addition, an Emission Reduction Unit (ERU) may be garnered from a Joint Implementation (JI) agreement between two industrialized countries implementing an emission reduction project in one of the countries. In contrast, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) signals that if a project is undertaken between an industrialized country and a developing country, it allows the industrialized country to invest in ‘low cost’ emission reduction technology to generate Certified Emission Reduction (CER) units.

As it will be further clarified, these market mechanisms are problematic, as they do little to change our reliance on fossil fuels, and can be seen to actually encourage the fossil fuel industries through investments in carbon emissions and the allocation of ‘free credits,’ as the polluters are given emissions credits equivalent to their 1990 levels of emissions minus their reduction commitment.⁵ This leads, in effect, to financial rewards for pollution. Emissions trading poses problems due to the fictitious nature of the commodities being traded, the related difficulties with verification, and the encouragement of the commodification and enclosure of the biosphere.

That is, in order that carbon may be traded, it must be made exchangeable in a commodity form. The process of the commodification of carbon is accomplished through abstraction and equivalence into quantifiable terms. The mechanisms encouraging this commodification, however, are largely controlled by the global North, leading to a situation of imperialism into the biosphere, as finance, industry and nations stake a claim to what was heretofore an ‘unclaimed global good.’⁶ The flexible mechanisms and increased financialization thus represent a new form of accumulation and enclosure – yet are simultaneously part of a broader neoliberal agenda of deregulation and privatization.

NATURE AS FICTITIOUS CAPITAL: CARBON MARKETS

Thus it is necessary to analyze the cap and trade mechanisms and the development of carbon markets as part of a broader process of commodification, de-regulation and financialization. It is clear that an analysis of the growth of fictitious capital as applied to carbon markets has much to offer for a critical understanding of how these markets lead to an intensified accumulation and commodification of the earth’s resources.

We can understand fictitious capital to be a paper claim to future wealth. Similarly, credit, as a form of fictitious capital can be represented by a ‘promise to pay later,’ or a ‘bill of exchange, a promissory note with a fixed date of payment, a ‘document of deferred payment.’”⁷ How these concepts relate to ecological and economic crisis is clear, especially when we consider that Marx could be talking about the current state of our financial sector when it is considered that Marx foresaw the potential for the financial sector to appear as an enterprise on to its own.

Increasing deregulation and financialization has brought a widespread acceptance of markets and financial instruments as capable of regulating polluting activities. As eco-Marxists have shown, it is in response to the taken-for-granted assumption of nature as capital that neo-classical environmental economists have attempted to account for ecological loss by placing an economic value on the waste products of industry, such as carbon. It is thereby hoped that ‘externalities’ such as pollution will be reduced through the valuation and exchangeability of environmental loss through the trading of pollution credits, and the implementation of the most ‘cost effective’ solution for the ecological crisis. A price is applied through the concept of ‘scarcity’ to carbon, with the logic being ‘we will use less if we have to pay for it.’ Yet, attempts to valorize waste products such as carbon through the application of scarcity principles leads to a contradiction espoused in the quantitative logic of capital – as it abstracts from the qualitative realm of use-value. That is, surplus production and the accumulation of capital leads to the tendency for the economic process to become detached from all qualitative restrictions, and the related tendency to reduce all qualitative processes to the monetary form.⁸

REGULATION OR REVOLUTION

The apparent consensus for achieving sustainability through the extension of the financial sphere to pollution is extremely troubling, especially given the current neoliberal context of deregulated financial transactions. Yet within the neoliberal climate financial regulation is unlikely. However, even if more regulation of the financial sphere was put into place, it would not solve the problems inherent in the commodification of nature. The process of the commodification of nature and pollution through the creation of a carbon market explains the emphasis on ‘sustainability’ as ‘non-declining natural capital,’ thus ensuring the continued supply of natural capital.⁹ The capitalization of nature and the various economic techniques employed in this vein leads to an enhanced perception of the capitalist state’s capabilities for dealing with ecological crisis. This is further enabled by the state portrayal of the ecological crisis as a “series of discrete environmental problems (pollution, global warming, erosion) to be managed.”¹⁰ Yet, despite government involvement in climate change negotiations, climate change has been increasingly addressed in profoundly undemocratic ways. That is, the commodification and financialization of nature leads to increased inequality and new forms of enclosure, and closes off opportunity for participation in decision making surrounding the environment, as it displaces policy decisions to financial interests.

The move to carbon trading and the purchase of offsets is an example of the attempt to commodify nature, in that nature is thought to have a certain economic value in capitalist terms and thus can be exchanged, or ‘offset,’ through the purchase of a modern form of indulgences. Consumers have become aware of their ‘carbon footprint,’ the impact they exercise on the environment through their lifestyles, and are eager to buy their way out of consumer guilt. It appears that the acceptance of carbon finance as a resolution to the climate crisis is widespread in popular opinion. The evolution of carbon markets is not too surprising, however, given the context of neoliberalism, financialization, and the general acceptance of market-based solutions and incentives for social change. One particularly troubling market-based ‘solution’ to climate change is that of the Clean Development Mechanism, a flexible mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol. As we will see, the CDM represents an intensified form of accumulation and imperialism and does little to solve the climate problem.

THE CLEAN DEVELOPMENT MECHANISM

The Clean Development Mechanism is based on the idea that emissions from a polluter can be ‘offset’ or ‘nullified’ through various investment schemes in ‘carbon sinks’ or ‘renewables.’¹¹ As forests, oceans, and soil store carbon, they are known as carbon sinks. Carbon is released into the atmosphere during the burning of fossil fuels and the destruction of forests. Forests, oceans, vegetation, soil and the atmosphere engage in a carbon cycle through photosynthesis,¹² and can be seen in terms of a carbon ‘pool.’ If a pool absorbs more carbon than is released, then it is known as a ‘sink,’ with a ‘source’ being that which emits more than is absorbed. De-forestation turns sinks into sources and thus shifts the balance in the carbon pool to lower levels stored in forests and higher levels released in to the atmosphere. Fossil fuel deposits are also a significant source, but carbon remains untapped unless humans release it through burning, in which case the amount of carbon in the atmosphere is increased.¹³ With the Clean Development Mechanism comes the use of re-forestation projects as ‘sinks’ to absorb carbon such as monoculture tree plantations.

The Kyoto Protocol defines the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), and stipulates that an Annex I Party (wealthy countries with an emission-reduction commitment) may implement ‘emission-reduction projects’ in developing countries. These projects allow an Annex I country to accumulate Certified Emission Reduction (CER) credits, with each one being equivalent to one tonne of CO₂. These credits can then be used to meet Kyoto targets with the stipulation that projects should be formulated to assist developing countries in the achievement of sustainable development.

However, CDM projects often involve the enclosure of land for large-scale monoculture tree plantations, thus displacing people dependent on the land for survival. In some cases local peoples have been forcibly removed – as was the case in Uganda where 13 villages were evicted for a Norwegian-sponsored carbon sinks project.¹⁴ Further, the Kyoto Protocol permits access to land in upwards of 10 million hectares for re-forestation CDM

projects to generate credits for wealthier countries, leading to destruction of the environment through the use of herbicides and pesticides, loss of biodiversity, and water use disruption due to the planting of non-indigenous species. In addition, the use of tree plantations as carbon sinks eludes the problem of dependence on fossil fuels and allows industry and governments to shirk responsibility for the health of the environment. Climate change and ecological crisis once again emerge as a new ‘market niche’ via the displacement of the real problem of greenhouse gases.

The theory is that these project-centred credits – regardless of origin – are to be ‘fungible’ or equivalent to emissions allowances distributed in the North. According to the development agencies, the CDM provides ‘flexibility’ and standardization for industrialized countries in emission reduction methods:

“It is the first global, environmental investment and credit scheme of its kind, providing a standardized emissions offset instrument, CERs. A CDM project activity might involve, for example, a rural electrification project using solar panels or the installation of more energy-efficient boilers. The mechanism stimulates sustainable development and emission reductions, while giving industrialized countries some flexibility in how they meet their emission reduction or limitation target.”¹⁵

The ultimate goal is flexibility and cost effectiveness, with increased commodification going unproblematized in the development paradigm. With flexible mechanisms, the UNFCCC proudly declared “a new commodity was created in the form of emission reductions or removals. Since carbon dioxide is the principal greenhouse gas, people speak simply of trading in carbon. Carbon is now tracked and traded like any other commodity. This is known as the ‘carbon market’.”¹⁶ The creation of a new commodity out of emission reductions and carbon is seen from this perspective to be a positive thing.

UNREGULATED FICTITIOUS COMMODITIES

However, the potential for fraud is extreme, due to the fictitious nature of the commodities being traded, and the discrepancy between investment in emission trading schemes and their regulation. As a result of this lack of regulation, corporations are being entrusted to produce accurate emission reports. Thus, in effect, the polluter is in charge of regulating the pollution. Whilst the appearance of regulation is maintained, the impossibility of standards becomes a speculative boom for both credit buyers and sellers, since it facilitates ‘skilled accounting’ as the books are largely free from public scrutiny or verification. It thus becomes possible to fabricate pollution rights sold to Northern fossil fuel emitters, who probably will not enquire too closely to their origin. Corporate self-restraint is no more likely in the carbon-offset markets than in the collateralized debt obligations market, making verification of assets impossible.¹⁷

In a neoliberal climate of privatization and deregulation, this lack of verification is characteristic of this political-economic

form, and well represented under the general rubric of the growing phenomenon of ‘corporate social responsibility.’ Emissions trading is one such form of corporate social responsibility, in that corporations can be seen as ‘doing something’ for the health of the planet, even if it is merely the selling of offsets or the creation of financial instruments out of pollution. Yet, the question of whether something is being done at all produces a negligible answer due to the high potential for fraud and the fictitious nature of the commodities being exchanged. This is highly problematic, as the health of the environment – in this case with respect to GHGs – becomes another realm for financial speculation, with financial decisions becoming an even greater factor in whether the earth is protected or not.

HEDGING THE RISK OF FICTITIOUS COMMODITIES

Due to these structural problems inherent in a system shy to regulation, there has been a proliferation of financial instruments designed to hedge risk, such as derivatives. The increase in speculative activities has encouraged a variety of these types of instruments designed to capture future values, or, shares of surplus value that have not yet been produced. This has resulted in an increase in fictitious capitals, such as mortgage-backed securities and collateralized debt obligations (CDO).¹⁸ These new financial instruments lead to financialized gambling on the likelihood of success in the carbon markets, as they are designed to capture future value, yet future rates of profit are uncertain.

Marx’s description of the situation of credit and fictitious capital is hauntingly resonant with the problems of verification in carbon markets today. “The shares in railway, mining, shipping companies, etc. represent real capital, i.e. capital invested and functioning in these enterprises as capital. It is in no way ruled out here that these shares may be simply a fraud.”¹⁹ As these shares represent fictitious capital, there is great difficulty in ascertaining their value. David McNally explains the significance for our current situation: “Since 2000, mortgage-backed ‘securities’ have been the flavour of the month, often in the form of Collateralised Debt Obligations (CDOs) – that is, debts backed

up by collateral (in this case houses). But if the value of the underlying asset (houses) plummets, no longer equal to the paper debts themselves, then the ‘collateral’ is increasingly fictitious.”²⁰ This illustrates the volatilities of a system so reliant on fictitious capital, a volatility that touches the carbon market as well, making “self-restraint no more likely in the offset markets than it was in the collateralized debt obligations market.”²¹ Just as the subprime mortgage based securities present an asset valuation problem, so it is also the case with carbon credits and the tendency to encourage the development of a secondary market of speculators. The danger of a loss of confidence in offsets is apparent as the system relies on predictions of future profits, such that an environmental derivatives market very quickly emerges with credits sold in bulk quantities to speculators on the price of carbon. Clearly the system is more oriented toward accumulation and profit rather than the stated goals of ‘sustainable development.’

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

The Kyoto Protocol is simultaneously touted as the way forward in ‘sustainable development’ whilst it is regarded as an inadequate agreement, but better than ‘doing nothing at all.’ This consensus has led to the subsumption of opposition from many ecological groups in the interest of ‘working together’ (e.g. government, business, environmentalists) to solve the climate crisis. It is necessary for environmentalists to look more closely at the flexible mechanisms to understand the process of the financialization of the biosphere and the deeper extension of accumulation into the natural realm, and to question whether increased accumulation is an effective way to deal with the climate problem.

It is clear that CDM projects will continue to place the blame on the ‘third world’ for the ecological crisis, whilst exploiting the availability of cheap materials in undeveloped locations. The CDM projects are merely an avenue for the expansion of capital and the commodity form. CDM projects in undeveloped locations facilitate a low-cost solution to innovation and are potentially less ‘riskier’ if they fail, as less capital has been invested. As climate justice movements organizing around the Copenhagen talks illustrate, these projects will not address the north’s climate indebtedness to the south for its development and will further place poorer countries in debt through financialized non-solutions to climate change.

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that financialized solutions to climate change are problematic due to the vulnerability of the financial system to crises of fictitious capital, a vulnerability that is magnified with the impossibility of regula-



tion of the financial system. Not only does the financial system encourage increased inequality as an intensified form of accumulation, it also displaces policy decisions to investor interests.

The flexible mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol are part of a wider trend of neoliberal deregulation, commodification of the commons, and increased financialization. They represent a shift in the relationship of capital to the environment in an effort to ‘internalize the externalities’ – a change in accumulation strategy. Clearly the move to create a fictitious capital market for carbon will have disastrous effects on the environment, as projects will not be funded on the basis of environmental benefit, but in the interests of profit. As the Copenhagen negotiations have illustrated, the wealthy countries and the ruling elite within India, Brazil and China that lead the negotiation process are refusing to take responsibility for the climate change problem yet are eager to achieve ‘consensus’ in a non-committal agreement. Yet not only is the Accord non-committal, it further continues along the path of market-based solutions to climate change. It is necessary to look for alternative agreements and actions that do not justify the commodification of the environment as a necessity for its salvation, such as the environmental groups involved in the Durban Declaration on Carbon Trading and the environmental justice movements opposing the Copenhagen negotiations.

The Durban Declaration on Carbon Trading came out of a meeting that occurred in Durban, South Africa in October 2004 of representatives from organizations and peoples’ movements. The declaration condemns carbon markets for encouraging a reliance on fossil fuels and the commodification of the biosphere, in that the commodification of carbon will lead to increased inequality through the transformation and enclosure of environments into ‘carbon dumps.’ The burden of carbon dumps will disproportionately fall to “small island states, coastal peoples, indigenous peoples, local communities, fisherfolk, women, youth, poor people, elderly and marginalized communities.”²²

It is imperative for environmentalists to reject reformist politics and attitudes such as ‘it’s better than nothing,’ as clearly, the financialization of carbon will lead to worse consequences than ‘nothing.’ Yet there is also growing opposition to carbon trading from groups such as the Durban Group, the Indigenous Environment Network, the Mobilization for Climate Justice, and Carbon Trade Watch, among others. These network of groups argue that climate change is a human rights and environmental justice issue, as those least responsible for GHG emissions will be the most effected by their impacts. Clearly there is mobilization that continues on after Copenhagen, and a growing recognition of the problem of market-based approaches to climate change. As the Yes Men hoax and the climate justice movements illustrated, not only is Canada’s position on climate change shameful and inadequate, but the whole process of international climate change negotiations is flawed with the continued reliance on a financial system that brought the world to ruin with its collapse. **R**

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Turkey: Capital's Crisis, Labour's Burden

Baris Karaagac and Yasin Kaya

The world capitalist economy has been going through the most severe crisis since the Great Depression. While many of the main features of the financial crisis – banking collapses, mortgage foreclosures and financial contagion – have been centralized in the advanced capitalist core countries, the crisis has also sharply impacted the semi-peripheries. Even after two decades of IMF-led structural adjustment policies, these so-called emerging countries have not been spared from the economic fallout.

Turkey has been among the most affected countries. While there is little – or no – evidence that working class militancy led to the crisis, it is workers that are being made to pay the costs of bailing out global capitalism. The significance of this crisis for Turkey has been twofold: the crisis in the real economy aggravated the already severe situation of the labour market; and it has given Turkish capital and the state further political space to implement their neoliberal agenda.

THE CRISIS IN TURKEY

When the crisis set in, the first reaction of the AKP (Justice and Development Party – *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) government was sheer denial of the possible impact of the global crisis on the Turkish economy. Referring to the absence of bankruptcies or turmoil in the financial sector, the government ignored the initial impacts of the crisis in the economy as a whole, and the goods producing ‘real’ sectors in particular. The government was right about one thing: this was not a crisis of the Turkish financial sector as it was in 1994 and 2001. But they were wrong about the extent and nature of the crisis: in this case global financial turbulence made for a crisis of the real economy in Turkey.

At the outset, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan underlined the soundness of the recently restructured financial sector as to why the crisis did not or would not hit Turkey as it did in other countries: “Thanks to the lessons we learned in the early 2000s regarding our financial system, we have argued that what happened in Europe and the U.S. would not take place in Turkey. Thank God, there is nothing to be afraid of.”¹

If we take a closer look however, a different picture emerges as to why the financial sector was insulated from the turbulence on the global market. This was not due to its soundness or the restructuring that has taken place in Turkish financial markets since the early 2000s. In the last three months of 2008, Turkey witnessed an outflow of foreign capital amounting to \$10.8-billion, without compensating documented inflows of foreign capital. This could have easily shaken the financial sector to its foundations. This situation, however, was prevented ‘miraculously’ by the inflow of ‘undocumented’ \$12.5-billion in the same pe-

riod.² It is still not clear where this huge amount of money came from. Was it a divine intervention to save the neoliberal ‘Islamist’ government, dirty drug money or a sudden surge in ‘hot money’? Whatever it was, this money, along with the extensive use of foreign exchange reserves, balanced out the capital outflows, stabilized the exchange rate and saved both the financial sector and the ruling AKP government facing local elections in March 2009.

The real economy was not as fortunate as the financial sector. Indeed, the crisis for the Turkish economy as a whole turned out to be the worst crisis since the early 1980s, at the beginning of the neoliberal period. According to the Turkish Statistics Institute (TUIK), GDP shrank by 6.5% in the fourth quarter of 2008 after 27 quarters of growth. This fall in the GDP reached an historic nadir in the first quarter of 2009 with a stunning drop of 14.7% – the worst recorded fall in Turkish economic history. Between October 2008 and September 2009, national income dropped by 8.2%, as compared to the 6.1% fall in 1994 and 5.7% in 2001.

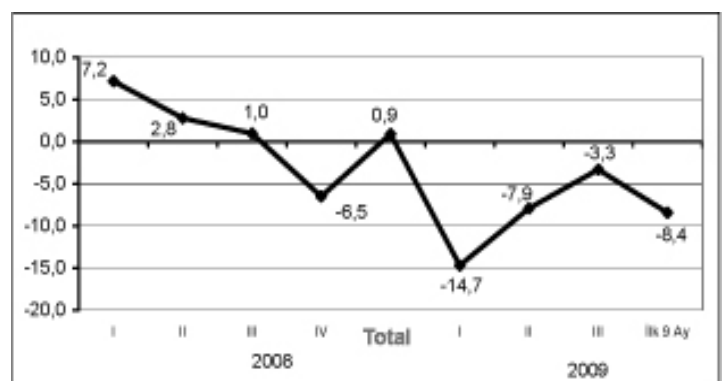


Fig. 1: Turkish Economy Quarterly GDP (Gross Domestic Product) Growth, 2008-09 (% change)³

For the industrial sector, a similar trend can be observed. Between January and October 2009, industrial production fell by 13.1%. Although there was a slight improvement in October 2009, this was mostly due to reductions in certain taxes. Accordingly, the rate of total capacity utilization decreased from 80.3% in January 2009 to only 63.8% a year later. Since March 2009, however, there has been a modest recovery, so that by November, utilization stood at 70.7%. But compared to the pre-crisis levels, industrial production remains relatively stagnant into 2010, still reeling from internal problems to Turkey and weak external demand conditions from the contradiction of macroeconomic policy-making in the Eurozone from the neo-mercantilist policies of Germany, on the one side, and the austerity being imposed on Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland, on the other.

THE STATE AND CLASS STRUGGLE

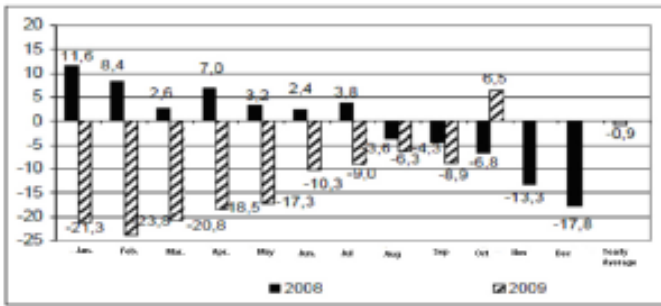


Fig. 2: Turkish Monthly Industrial Production Index, 2008-09 (% change)⁴

THE LINGERING IMPASSE OF THE TURKISH LABOUR MOVEMENT

It is the Turkish working classes who have had to bear the burden of the crisis of the real economy. Already a grave problem, unemployment reached record highs during the crisis. Before the crisis, the official number for the unemployed was 2.4 million. However, the unofficial rate was almost double this number, standing at 4.6 million.⁵ In 2009, the official number of the unemployed increased by 860,000, reaching 3,471,000 across the country. The official unemployment rate went up by 3% to 14%. These numbers reflect the overall increase in urban unemployment, which rose from 3.8% to 16.6%, whereas rural unemployment rose by 1.7% to 8.9%. The non-agricultural unemployment rate, in the same period, reached 17.4% from 13.6% a year prior. This particularly hit women, among whom unemployment peaked at 21.9% with an increase of 3.8%. Of course, these official statistics should be read with the utmost caution since the actual numbers tend to be much higher than the official ones.

Real wages continued to decline in the period of the crisis. The minimum wage, which 40 million Turkish citizens depend upon, remained not only below the poverty line but also below the starvation line. In other words, 40 million people still do not have access to the basic necessities of everyday life.

The most significant consequence of the crisis for class relations and struggle in Turkey has arguably been that it gave the state to implement the policies on behalf of capital that had been on hold or progressing more slowly than desired. Although the first reaction of the state was, as mentioned above, denial or underestimating the actual and future impact of the crisis, this attitude almost immediately gave way to a strict stance toward labour as soon as the latter made attempts to give a collective response.

The Turkish state's stance toward labour has taken directly repressive forms and also ideological measures. The intolerance of the state for organized labour action became evident the most during the last May Day demonstrations in Istanbul. While the Left and labour wanted to hold a mass demonstration in Taksim Square, which has a very powerful and symbolic meaning for labour and its struggle in the past half a century, the state did not reverse its policy in effect since 1977 of banning demonstrations there, and refused to allow a mass rally in the Square. While a small group gained access to the Square, most of the other participants were exposed to police brutality on the side streets.

The 12,000 striking Tekel tobacco workers has met similar repression. The strike emerged as a response to the deepening of the neoliberal agenda of flexibilization and reduction of labour costs, and putting the burden of the crisis on the society as a whole. During the crisis, the state wanted to change the status of thousands of workers via a law known as '4 C,' which meant increasing insecurity, unpaid vacations, and lower wages for public employees, as part of the privatization of these state workers. The workers took to the streets and embarked on one of the most formidable strikes in Turkey in recent years, giving a shot in the arm to the whole Turkish working class. The Prime Minister responded by accusing the workers of being "ideological." This was a rather vulgar effort at dissociating the workers' demands from the ongoing crises in the Turkish economy and labour market, and isolating Tekel workers from the rest of the workers' movement.

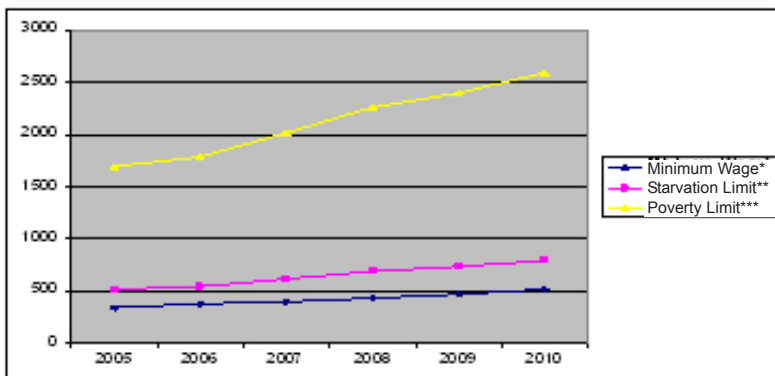


Fig. 3: Minimum Wage, Starvation and Poverty Lines in Turkey, 2005-2010⁶

*The first six months of each year. (TL)

** The level of minimum basic needs for a family of four.

*** The level of human needs for a family of four.

There is some foundation to this strategy of the state. The first reflex of the Turkish labour confederations – Türk İş, Hak İş, and Turk Kamu Sen⁷ – in response to the crisis was to try to protect the jobs of their members. This reflex is quite understandable when lay-offs speedily increased and hit many organized workers. However, the response by the unions was restricted to their own members and the problems – both before and during the crisis – faced by millions of unorganized workers were not taken on and addressed. To the contrary, government policies, such as those compiled under the name “the employment package” and which placed the burden of labour costs on society without costs to capital, were supported or simply not fought. Moreover, the confederations cooperated with employers’ organizations and participated, somewhat mockingly, in campaigns like “Don’t stay at home, go shopping.”

The textile branch of DISK (the Revolutionary Labour Unions Confederation – Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu) took this cooperative and submissive stance one step further in claiming, in advertisements in major newspapers, that it was capital which was the real victim of the crisis. Further, that the organizations of industrialists had actually refrained from expressing their problems and concerns due to fears of a government backlash. The Turkish unions’ submissive reliance on the state and cooperation with capital to overcome the crisis made it much easier, on the one hand, for the government and capital to implement an ‘exit strategy’ intensifying neoliberal labour market reforms, while, on the other, profoundly shaking the confidence of the Turkish working classes in the unions and their leadership.

CAN TURKISH WORKERS DEVELOP A NEW RESPONSE?

Despite the failure of organized labour to form a conscious class struggle approach to the crisis, the latter stages of crisis have opened up a space for grassroots labour action. This has forced the unions and their top ranks to shift their accommodative stance. A number of local actions, such as occupation of factories and protests, took place across Turkey over 2009. As the crisis evolved and deepened, Turk-Is had to take a more critical and militant stance toward government policies. It helped to organize a one day general strike on November 25th and a strike in the transportation sector on December 16th. Moreover, it protested against the ideological assault of the government on labour and did not participate in the negotiations on the minimum wage.

The change of attitude within Turk-Is has been due to two factors. First of all, the pressure from the grassroots organizations, in particular those organized in the tobacco and transportation sectors, forced the union bureaucracy to become more active. Second, the government’s favoritism toward HAK-IS, as its new main interlocutor in labour relations, pushed TURK-IS toward a more anti-government position. Similarly, the political conflicts the government had with MHP (the Nationalist Action Party – Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi) cast Turk-Kamu-Sen (which has organic relationships with MHP) toward a similar position. Unlike in the past, Turk Kamu-Sen, which has historically been

antagonistic to the left, developed some minimal cooperation with ‘left’ unions.

What might be a strategic response of labour in Turkey to the ongoing crisis and the assault launched by both the state and capital? First of all, the current crisis in Turkey needs to be grasped not as a technical failure of state policies or as a result of workers’ actions, but as a consequence of capitalist property and class relations. It is not that task of labour at all in this conjuncture to be suggesting technical economic solutions to the government and bureaucracy.

Second, in a crisis where capital is switching from creating material goods and services toward profitable but unproductive financial activities, production needs to be encouraged to protect employment, wage levels and productive capacities of communities. The ongoing campaign of unions and others advocating the adoption of a law forbidding employers from laying off their workers is a good example in this regard.⁸

Third, there is a strong current in Turkish analyses that present the current crisis as something exogenous, imposed from the outside by foreign capitalists and institutions. These contentions should be taken with a huge grain of salt. Although Turkey is a *late developer* capitalist formation, Turkey is a *capitalist* country, with significant capital accumulation, and a mature and organized capitalist class with increasingly strong links to international flows of capital. The Turkish capitalist class is neither a colonial comprador bourgeoisie, nor a traditional national bourgeoisie defending the national economic space against imperialist capital. Rather than giving impulse to nationalistic and protectionist sentiments, or the so-called ‘patriotic’ discourses that both the Kemalists and the AKP resort to, Turkish labour needs to focus on forging its own capacities and political independence as a class without illusions of being able to forge future ‘nationalist’ or ‘patriotic’ alliances with sections of Turkish capital. Even though imperialism has always had – and continues to have – a real presence in Turkey, especially via NATO and EU and U.S. interests, imperialist capital is integrated into the structures of the Turkish power bloc and state (even in the form of the Islamist AKP).

Finally, Turkish workers and the Left should stop pinning their hopes to a power struggle among pro-capitalist forces, as between Kemalists and Islamists, or between pro-EU and nationalist parties, or between Istanbul and Anatolian capital, and so forth. The economic crisis has revealed an imperative need for the Turkish workers’ movement to create and pursue its own socialist agenda. This crisis has hit Turkish workers as a whole, be it organized or not, men or women, and all segments of it.

Here, it needs to be underlined that, perhaps, the hardest hit has been Kurdish labourers, in particular in those sectors with little or no protection and security, in the unregulated sectors spilling around Ankara, Istanbul and elsewhere. As the Kurdish struggle constitutes the hottest item on the national agenda today, it is very important to see it not only as an ethnic/identity question but also as a class issue. In this regard, a sign put up during the tobacco workers’ strike is quite insightful. It read: “Turks and

Feminism of the Anti-Capitalist Left

Lidia Cirillo

At the beginning of this year the Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) association in Italy had a discussion on drafting a feminist manifesto. While there are elements specific to Italy, the following notes on the discussions by Lydia Cirillo pose many important questions for the updating of a Marxist Feminist analysis.

1. FEMINISM AND DEMOCRATIC, PROGRESSIVE AND REVOLUTIONARY CURRENTS

Feminism must be declined in its plural, feminisms, as women belong to various classes and cultures and have different political reference points. For example, there is a form of feminism in Italy among right-wing parliamentarians and career women, who lay claim to their share of power with the aid of traditional feminist arguments, decry the dynamics of exclusion and marginalization and demand anti-discriminatory measures.

And yet feminism is always born and reborn on the left, alongside revolutionary, democratic or progressive tendencies: on the margins of the 1789 revolution, in the national revolutions of the first half of the 19th Century, within the movement for the abolition of slavery in the United States, alongside the workers' movement, in the radicalisation of the 1960s and 1970s, in the global justice movement...

Right-wing feminism has always and only been the effect of picking up ideas born on the left, a sort of cultural fallout that earlier or later has had an impact throughout society as a whole. This phenomenon can be explained by the obvious reason that it has been easier (or less difficult) for women to exert pressure on men on the left in the name of liberation, by exposing their contradictions and using their lexicon and patterns of thought. The concepts of equality, self-determination, liberation, difference, revolution etc. have been nothing else than a feminised version of ideas elaborated by the political currents alongside which various forms of feminism were born or re-born.

This observation does not allow us to have any idyllic vision of the relationships between feminism and male revolutionary, democratic and progressive tendencies. Men's resistance to feminism has been tenacious, at times explicit and vulgar, at others subtle or even unconscious.

The early socialist movement included feminist men such as Saint-Simon and Fourier and indescribable misogynists such as Proudhon and Lasalle. Engels laid the conceptual bases for an anticapitalist feminism, comparing women to the proletariat and men to the bourgeoisie and locating in production and reproduction the bases of the social organisation of the human species, but afterwards these intuitions were lost in theory and practices. A

• Continued from page 34

Kurds are here but where is the AKP?" Such a sentiment, clearly reflects the two major opposing and emerging fronts in Turkish society: Turkish capital, encompassing both nationalist and Islamist capitalists, and Turkish workers, in their multiple colours, struggling to emerge as a new force on the political scene. **R**

Baris Karaagac and Yasin Kaya write regularly on Turkey's political economy and are completing their doctorates at York University.

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full-fledged history of misogyny and anti-feminism in the workers' movement could be written, but in this text we can only touch upon the two most widespread attitudes within today's anticapitalist left.

In general, few men are so uncouth as to fail to render the expected homage to feminism and to envisage a proletarian, feminist and environmentalist future. However, these recognitions are almost always accompanied by a lack of interest. The ins and outs, differences and complex theoretical elaborations of feminism remain little-known the extent to which gender can represent an irreplaceable framework for the understanding of the logic of human relations remains overlooked.

The other attitude, much rarer to tell the truth, is the paternalism of men who claim to teach feminism to women, to take the lead and set the agenda for their work and discussions. Naturally, we can't rule out the fact that a given male may know and understand more about women's politics and feminism than a given female. However, feminism is born, consolidates and renews itself only in the course of women accessing intellectual and psychological autonomy. It may be a slow and tortuous process, but there is no substitute.

Without autonomy, even the feminism of anticapitalist left women is reduced to falling back on what was theorised and practised in separatist milieus. This feminism has proven itself capable of independent elaboration and a more relevant reading of gender-based power relations. At the same time, it has often represented needs and outlooks of academic circles or in any event female milieus with little interest in class conflicts and always exposed to the temptation to depict their own specific interests as the interests of women in general.

2. PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES

Understanding feminism means before all understanding the nature of power relations between women and men. Today, there is a post-feminism that denies that oppression still exists, at least in the parts of the world where formal equality has been achieved. The formula "specific oppression" provides some foothold to that current; moreover, this is not the only reason a new one should be found. It is preferable to say that every human society, excluding none, bears the mark of manifest or latent patriarchal structures, which in different ways discriminate, exclude, oppress and commit violence against women.

Patriarchy in the literal meaning of the word is a system of relations in which property and social position are passed down from the father to the male child, almost always to the first-born son. It is obvious in Northwestern societies (but also in some others) that this type of reproduction of social positions no longer exists and reality is less blatant and more complex.

However, the logic of the male genealogy of power, which remains obvious beyond its legal and formal aspects, has an anthropological dimension and two centuries of struggle for eman-

ipation have still not succeeded in doing away with it. The four UN conferences on women have provided data that at the time surprised even the most pessimistic theorists on oppression, revealing (for example) that the percentage of women owning land and real estate in the world does not exceed 3 – 4 %. Moreover, Amnesty International's data on violence against women have been a bitter surprise and confirmation. But the simplest way to understand patriarchal structures is to follow the thread of a European woman's existence from birth to death.

In other societies we find selective abortion and more little girls than little boys dying from malnutrition; in our societies patriarchal structures begin to act later. In their first years of life, little girls, in their difficult path toward femininity, encounter a phenomenon which Freud called "castration," i.e. the discovery that they did not have a penis, leading to a painful feeling of inferiority and conditioning their intellectual abilities and how they viewing themselves and others view them. At first, feminism responded to the castration thesis by arguing that Freud superimposed the male outlook over the female one, but later the issue has proven far more complex.

If Freud, as some had suspected, only confused little girls' and a little boys' lines of sight, he would have created a banal misunderstanding. Then we could not explain the reasons for his great influence on Western thought, and not only Western. The castration thesis is linked to clinical experiments, to tested outcomes that women also see themselves as castrated, lacking and deprived of something. Therefore, castration plays the role of an ideology: it is the viewpoint of those who are "above" in a power relation, interiorised and incorporated by those who are "under." The inferiority theory does not flow from a male prejudice; it is a reality in the female unconscious. This reality acts every time real and not presumed difference comes into play, the different positions in relation to power. In fact, women do not envy the penis but the phallus, which is power in its diversified and multiple forms, of which the penis is merely the phallic fetish.

Another example. Violence against women has a scope and spread that Amnesty International data has finally made obvious. However, a particular woman may encounter no instance of violence in her life, other than the violence nature inflicts on us through diseases and death. And yet, her life will be deeply conditioned by violence, because the risk of violence entails precautions, lifestyles and psychological attitudes. The extent to which the world has been made to man's measure is proven by the paradox that the victim is the one who winds up in jail. Patriarchal structures that run through society make the risk of violence one of the main reasons for the segregation of women, especially young women.

Many more examples could be given, for example women's double working day, that is taking on tasks that were once men's domain and the absence of any reciprocity; or the overrepresentation of the masculine in the public sphere, which imposes rhythms and ways, counter to those of women's own existence or again the normative images of femininity constructed and crystallised through millennia of male monopoly over sym-

bolic tradition. It seems that something is changing among the new generations in Italy, but these changes are slow and uncertain

Other effects of these latent structures are more complex, more difficult to pinpoint and define. It is true that we also think with our sex, perhaps less than is assumed by psychoanalysis, but we certainly do also think with our sex. If it is true that men have had a monopoly over culture for millennia, then a disturbing hypothesis is possible. The hypothesis is that every time a woman penetrates particularly structured and formalised fields of knowledge, she must cross a petrified forest of male signs and symbols, in which she will have greater difficulty finding her way.

The very ways women's presence makes itself felt in politics are the consequences of the existence of patriarchal structures. With their silences, their limited presence and their insecurity, women exercise a criticism of every political arena. The greater the male presence and dominance in a given political body, the more that body has to do with the logics of power.

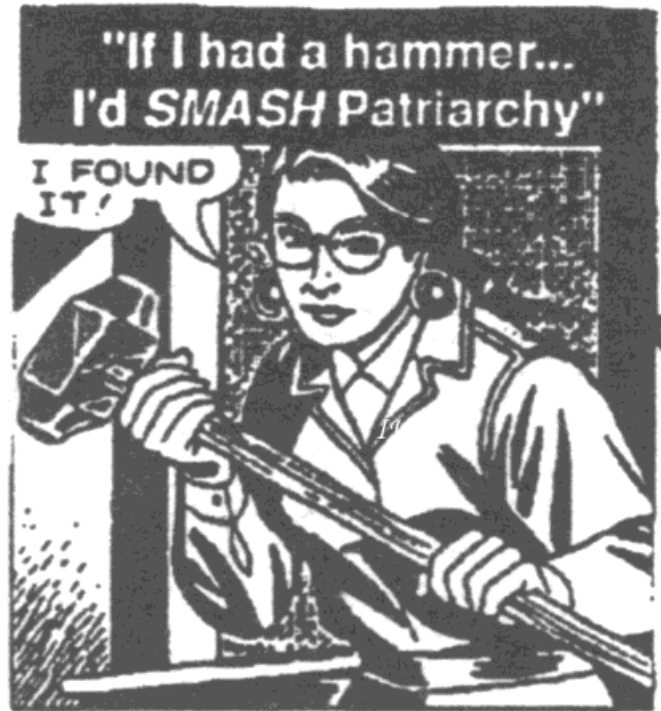
One might set forth a theorem, formulate a proposition or an equation. Political institutions, the army, the clergy etc. are the most male milieus because they are also those deeply involved in power. For various reasons these institutions can co-opt women: to get out of criticisms and glaring absence of women, to recover credibility or because they need a relationship with the social body.

The most significant example of male and female distribution is precisely the Catholic Church. An institution that builds ties to vast popular sectors, even sometimes feeding the hungry and quenching the thirst of the thirsty, it could not do without women's energy and their tendency to view themselves as caregivers. Above a Church open to the feminine side, where it extends deeply into society, rises the dome of a power hierarchy rigidly closed to women, the expression of that capacity to conserve the archaic human relations typical of religions.

3. THREE KEY ISSUES FOR ANTICAPITALIST FEMINISM IN ITALY

Patriarchal structures condition women's lives and construct gender in rather different ways in different times and locations. The great number of demands – for example those compiled in the platform of the 2000 World March of Women – show the scope of the unresolved problems on a global scale. It is obvious that women in Afghanistan have different problems from those experienced by French or German women and that the central issues in contemporary Italy are not those in the forefront in the decades spanning the 19th and 20th century, which saw the first great wave of feminist movements. It is obvious that in different social milieus, different generations and different women's aspirations, the obstacles that women must overcome are not the same.

However, we must renounce the chronological illusion and not believe that we have almost secured emancipation. If it is



true that, where formal equality has been achieved, more complex tasks await feminism, it is also true that battles already won, problems apparently already resolved and archaic relations can re-emerge to face us. Violence against women is the clearest example and its greater visibility has different and complementary explanations. Nowadays, women more frequently speak out against situations which they put up with in earlier years, public opinion becomes increasingly scandalised by matters that used to be laughed off; men react, as often occurs in power relations, with a combination of backward outlooks and punitive violence.

Anticapitalist left feminism must not only refer to the needs and aspirations of proletarian women; it must take on the demands of the entire female sex. Naturally, since our intervention targets certain milieus, it is obvious that the demands of women workers, immigrants, unemployed women, female students, women in left parties, movements and trade unions will be in the forefront.

Here are some examples of issues on which we have worked in recent years and which must remain a priority in the near future.

A. CRITICISM OF WAR, MILITARISM AND VIOLENCE

Women's politics has the instruments for a specific criticism of the military-virile drift produced by permanent war, without falling back on ideas about women's peaceful nature and female non-violence. Non-violence is the other face of violence: both take the unchanging nature of power relations for granted. Violence is a permanent dissuasive force against those who are challenging them; while non-violence can disarm only one of the two

sides, the side that is “beneath,” subject to oppression, exploitation and neocolonial plunder. The most obvious proof of this in Italy has been the spokespersons for non-violence, who are intransigent against the violence of the oppressed and then vote in Parliament for new credits for the Italian military mission in Afghanistan.

More astute feminism has already explained that the supposed peaceful nature of women is to a great extent linked to the need to interiorise an aggressivity that power relations with men have not allowed them to display. Criticism of militarism and violence (above all violence against women) is based on many things other than the idealisation of subaltern status and oppression. Women can exercise it first of all because they do not have to conform to the stereotypes on which the construction of masculinity is based. They are not called upon to exhibit hardness and strength, which are phantasms linked to male sexuality. More than men, they are subjected to the devastating impact of human relations dominated by violence.

Against the violence on which power relations are based (between the sexes, between classes, between nations etc.) our feminism counterpoises above all a society in which this type of relations has been abolished. Therefore, it supports resistance, struggles and radical transformation projects.

It is against wars, militarism, armies and their hierarchical organisation. It does not think that violence is necessarily the proper response to violence; it considers the life of any person a precious thing and thus is not only against the death penalty but also against the cruelty and excesses of legitimate self-defence. However, it does not make non-violence a principle, because it recognises the right of subjects of liberation struggles to defend their own paths.

Our feminism also responds to violence against women above all with a logic of self-defence. Naturally, we don't mean women's armed self-defence against men because the relations between the sexes are regulated in a very different way. It does not believe the problem can be resolved via the control of the penis, even if it does consider State protection necessary and for the time being not replaceable by any other form. By self-defence, it means women's initiatives for the establishment and funding of antiviolence centres, so speaking out does not turn against victims and for metropolitan life to be organised starting out from women's needs, so women do not have to bear the cost of its irrationality and manifest or latent violence.

Finally, it remembers that women's politics is only apparently disarmed, as liberation dynamics have often been supported by people in arms in democratic, progressive or revolutionary movements. Resistance to Nazism/Fascism (for example) had an important impact on feminism and women.

B. FOR SECULARISM AND SELF-DETERMINATION, AGAINST CATHOLIC FUNDAMENTALISM

We live in a country which the Catholic Church still views as a state entity in which it is exercising its temporal power: it has

never resigned itself to the secular state and continues to fight it by all means at its disposal. In recent years, the rise of right-wing forces and political systems stacked in favour of Catholic political forces' ability to exert blackmail have actually increased the intrusiveness of the clergy with its patriarchal and homophobic implications.

Access to legal and free abortion has been challenged in various ways; it has prevented experimental use of pharmaceutical abortion; it has approved a horrible law, which constitutes the embryo as a legal subject from the very moment of conception. Moreover, we have witnessed a very harsh and often aggressive and racist opposition to any form of recognition of gay and lesbian couples. A short time ago, the ordeal of Piergiorgio Welby, a patient in the terminal phase of muscular dystrophy, concluded with a doctor's act of civil disobedience. For months, Welby had pleaded to be unhooked from the machine that forced him to survive in pain and would have imposed an even more painful death on him in the short term. His request became a clamorous political cause, in which the Vatican bureaucracy exerted all its powers of pressure and intimidation on judges and doctors.

Catholic fundamentalism (like all other forms of fundamentalism) does not represent a threat only to women and homosexual persons, but to all liberation processes, beyond the appearances and humanitarian and pacifist implications of the Church hierarchies' political action. They took a stand against war, but afterwards backed the idea of the Italian army's “peace mission.” They advocate a welcoming stance toward migrants, but then support the right-wing governments that enact discriminatory anti-immigration laws. Moreover, we must never forget that the Catholic Church was one of the institutions that favoured the rise of fascism, and shored the regime up for more than twenty years.

Evidently peace, hospitality and democracy are minor concerns for the Catholic clergy in comparison to those that lead it to privilege relations with the right wing, i.e. control over the daily lives not only of the faithful but of the entire country, over which it aims to exert its temporal power. In recent years, the feminist and queer movements have been the only forces resisting Catholic fundamentalism.

As for feminism, a certain disorientation has meant that for a long time this resistance has been weak. At the most delicate moment, when the law on reproduction techniques was put in the pipeline and then approved by the right-wing government, feminist organisations and groups remained entangled in a discussion in which it was obvious that the more sophisticated arguments of the Catholic forces were getting more attention, as were worries about the alarming implications of scientific research.

The spectre of the scientist who created Frankenstein, archaic fears over the loss of female reproductive powers, well-founded concern about the limits of scientific research and the role of multinationals in the embryo traffic all combined to put a brakes on the initiative. As a result, feminists did not succeed in going much beyond discussions on this issue. This is another rea-

son the referendum on the abrogation of this law was lost. In fact, it was lost for two reasons. The first is the very low turnout at the polls, not sufficient to reach the quorum. The question under discussion was complex, and contrary to abortion, direct experiences involved a very limited number of people. The second is that, while the referendum on the law decriminalising abortion in the first three months of pregnancy followed years of disobedience in practice and arguments rooted in women's right to self-determination, the referendum on reproductive techniques played out in the few months prior to the ballot, and in this context, the media played the determining role.

Later, direct attacks on access to legal abortions, in which the misogynistic and regressive stance was clearer, set the women's movement back in motion and in January 2006, a demonstration by hundreds of thousands of women in Milan provided a hard-hitting response. The very same day, the main organisations of the GLBTQ movement, including lesbians, gay men and transgendered people, demonstrated for PACS (recognition of civil unions). And the entire year 2006 was marked by demonstrations, initiatives and struggles on the issues of secularism and self-determination.

C. DEFENCE OF WOMEN WORKERS' RIGHTS

Paradoxically, the defeats of wage labour and globalisation have opened up new job opportunities for women. This is not a new paradox, but something that has already been seen in some ways in the history of class relations.

Women have been preferred in economies when they first appear on the world market, because these economies relied on productions with a high labour-power factor and thus on low wages, restrictions on trade-union organisation and severe limits on rights. In Europe too, when the workers' movement remained weak, it had to contend with the problem of female competition to the male work force, which is at least a partial explanation of the misogynist aspects of the workers' movement during its origins. Defence of women workers' rights thus also had the motive of reducing employers' interest in preferring to hire women.

Women have been preferred in the economies of the most developed countries, in which the service sector has grown and where there have been drastic attacks on the rights of wage labour, above all through the broad, molecular casualisation process.

The other side of the coin is that casualised work, impacting all wage labour, has a preference for women, for whom a steady job seems to have become nearly impossible. Laws protecting maternity act in this context as a strong disincentive to hiring for permanent jobs. Not only that, but in a more and more competitive career dynamic, women remain destined to remain behind or choose between a career and childbearing. To tell the truth, in the majority of cases it is impossible to opt for a profession, whatever a woman's personal life-plans, because being a woman in childbearing years puts limits on the possibilities for partnership in a firm or stable work.

Moreover, there is a crisis in occupational fields such as teaching, which guaranteed modest salaries but working times and rights compatible with the life choices of the majority of women.

Faced with such problems, feminism found itself also in the past dealing with the alternative of demanding specific rights for women, with the risk of increasing difficulties in their getting jobs, or renouncing such rights, putting them sooner or later in unsolvable contradictions.

The issue cannot be solved only from a gender outlook. Protection makes it harder for women to find jobs, when social relations are unfavourable to subordinate classes: it is no accident that fascism was a strong protector of maternity. For that reason, laws that allow women to reconcile work with an existence different from men's are not enough. It is also necessary to impose forms of hiring that make discrimination impossible. In Italy, in the 1970s, a reform of short-term placement forced employers to bring far more women into the factories than they would have wanted to. But many other measures are possible.

In terms of rights, outlooks and philosophies must also be changed. This means demanding the fewest possible specific rights for women and demanding instead that the measure of equality starts from women's point of view not men's. From this viewpoint, we refused the European standards repealing the ban on night work for women, demanding that they be also extended to men, except in the exceptional cases in which night work is absolutely indispensable. Or in the case of early pensions for women, we preferred sabbatical years for caregiving tasks, which could be taken by women and men, just as we preferred parental leave for mothers and fathers.

Such criteria obviously no longer apply when it is a matter of the irreducible difference in human bodies. This means there are specific women's rights such as leaves for pregnancy and childbirth with full income compensation, access to legal abortion without charge, access to assisted reproductive techniques for older women. In this case difference must prevail, as there is no grounds for men having an equal right to decide because it is women's bodies and lives that are involved and disrupted. **R**

Translated by Marie Lagatta.

Lidia Cirillo has been a member of the Italian section of the Fourth International since 1966. Feminist activist and leading figures in the World March of Women in Italy, she also founded the *Quaderni Viola (Purple notebooks, a feminist review)*. She is the author of several feminist works: *Meglio Orfane (Better to be Orphans)*, *Lettera alle Romane (Letter to Roman Women)*, and recently *La Lune Severa Maestra (The Moon, a Strict Mistress)* on the relationship between feminism and social movements.

Russia's Sexual Revolution After 1917

Colin Wilson

Before being stamped out by Stalinism, the initial phase of the 1917 Revolution in Russia opened up a period of sexual liberation. As part of LGBT history month in the UK Colin Wilson looked at its impact on gay liberation. Originally published by *Socialist Worker* at www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=20272

The Russian Revolution of 1917 changed the lives of gay men and lesbians. Russia became a beacon for workers, the poor and oppressed who saw for the first time how society could be run for the benefit of all.

The very process of making the revolution, of sweeping away the existing social order, made sexual liberation and genuine equality possible. To understand the impact of the revolution, it is important to look at Russia before 1917.

Most people lived as they had for hundreds of years – as peasants in small villages, living from the soil. Until 1861 most peasants were serfs, owned by the aristocracy. Russia was a dictatorship, ruled by the Tsar and opponents faced exile to the brutal cold of Siberia.

A tiny minority of Russians lived in wealth and splendour. For example, the Sheremetevs owned 200,000 serfs and had 340 servants waiting on them.

Sex was characterised by violence and oppression and sexual behaviour was controlled by the church and state. Homosexuality was illegal. Evidence of same sex relationships existed, but they showed mainly unequal relations between upper class landowners and their male servants or peasants.

Aristocratic women could not travel, work or study without their husband's permission. For peasants, marriage was for necessity and survival. A wife's tasks were to help her husband in the fields and produce children to do the same. Domestic violence was common. A proverb ran, "Hit your wife with the butt of the axe, get down and see if she's breathing. If she is, she's shamming and wants some more."

CHANGE

But from the mid-19th century, Russian society began to change. The Tsar abolished serfdom – though there was no real democracy, and extreme inequality remained. Industrialization

meant rapid urbanization in cities like Moscow and St Petersburg. Radical movements developed from the 1870s, carrying new ideas about women and sex. The novel *What is to be Done?* became the bible of the new movement. It tells the story of Vera Pavlovna who enters a fictitious marriage to escape her bourgeois parents. The novel recounts her dreams – its finale depicts a utopia where wealth and poverty are no more, men and women are equal, and people can choose what work to do and what relationships to have. Such ideas inspired thousands of young men and women.

Urbanization also brought changes to sexual relationships. There wasn't space or money to duplicate peasant marriage and family patterns in the cities. A homosexual sub-culture – the "little homosexual world" – emerged. Men met for sex in parks and public toilets. Wealthy men had liaisons with waiters, servants, soldiers and male prostitutes in bathhouses.

Lesbians found life more difficult. Wealthy women had leisure time to spend in the literary salons, fashionable meeting places for rich lesbians. But life was harder for working class women – brothels were meeting places for "koshki," or female cats, the name given to working class lesbians. The growing working class was central to the revolutionary movement, and women increasingly played a role.

In 1905 revolution broke out, but it was defeated. In 1917 a revolution was successful, and in October the Bolshevik party took power. Men and women became equal under law, divorce was available on demand, church control of sexual behaviour was abolished and abortion was legalised. The revolution transformed the lives of homosexuals with a flourish. All references to sex practices were removed from the Criminal Code in 1922. A sex crime was now described as an act violating the individuals' right to "life, health, freedom and dignity."

Relationships based on the unfamiliar ideas of complete freedom, equality and genuine friendship flourished. These legal reforms reflected changes in society. Peasant women sang songs about how they would divorce their husband if he beat them. A court confirmed the right of two women to marry.

Of course some bigoted ideas and practices remained. Long established ideas can be hard to overcome. But the Bolsheviks strove to make the advances real – so that women, homosexuals and workers were liberated in practice.

So for example, communal dining halls were instituted – partly to ensure people were fed, and partly to liberate women

from domestic labour. Through the civil war, every child in the capital got free food, and most adults ate in the dining halls as well.

Prostitution was decriminalised. The government set up co-operatives to provide support for prostitutes, access to medical support and training in other kinds of work. Dr. Grigory Batkis, director of the Moscow Institute for Sexual Hygiene, led the Soviet delegation to the World League for Sexual Freedom conference in Berlin in 1923. He made clear the approach of the new society:

“Soviet legislation... declares the absolute non-interference of the state and society into sexual matters, so long as no one’s interests are encroached upon.

“Concerning homosexuality, sodomy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offences against public morality, Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called ‘natural’ intercourse.”

Many of the gains the revolution achieved still do not exist in some countries to this day. In Britain abortion is not available on demand, and nor is divorce. Homosexuality was illegal until 1967 and only removed from the mental health register in 1993. Many discriminatory laws against homosexuals remained on the statute books in Britain until the start of this century.

The advances in Russia were not because of Bolshevik decrees, but because the revolution involved the vast majority of people fighting to transform society and take control of it themselves. But the lack of economic development meant that the country was too poor to sustain socialism.

The Bolsheviks relied on revolution spreading to more developed countries. This was a reasonable assumption. In 1919 British prime minister Lloyd George stated that, “The whole of Europe is filled with the spirit of revolution.” Unfortunately the radicalization failed to break through.

And the victorious Russian revolution faced years of war against supporters of the Tsar, and foreign armies determined to destroy the new socialist society. This took a huge toll. It made millions of children homeless and devastated the working class.

STALLED

The Bolsheviks had no choice but to introduce the New Economic Policy (NEP) in a bid to hold on to power until a more developed country became socialist. The policy partly reintroduced capitalism. Peasants were paid to produce grain. Limited funds meant communal dining halls were closed, as were many nurseries, which made it harder for women to work. Prostitution began to increase again. Slowly the old ways crept back. The problem was poverty and backwardness. Many peasants had never favoured divorce as their communal households centred on married couples.



“Women workers take up your rifles” - a Bolshevik poster calling women to arms in defence of the revolution in 1917. Sexual liberation was a central goal of the revolutionary movement

The Bolsheviks had sought to liberate men and women from the constraints of the family. But for many the family was the only option – the state had no money to guarantee women a decent standard of living. Joseph Stalin rose to power in this context of isolation and poverty. He had been a relatively minor figure in 1917, but represented an emerging class that believed the solution to Russian backwardness was to force workers and peasants to be more productive.

The state increasingly controlled and directed work and life. As under the Tsar, a woman’s main function was seen as reproduction – women with seven children received payments from the state, and those with eleven got even more money. The Stalinist government banned abortion, made divorce more difficult and recriminalised homosexuality. Gay men faced up to eight years in prison. Homosexuals were driven back into the closet and suicides rose significantly. In 1934 there were mass arrests in Moscow and other cities.

Anti-homosexual discourse was used in wartime propaganda between Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany. Stalin said “eradicate homosexuality and fascism will disappear,” while Hitler labelled homosexuality a “communist degeneracy.” Stalin’s betrayal of socialism, however, does nothing to diminish the revolutionary tradition of which the Bolsheviks were the best example. They saw the achievement of sexual liberation and the fight for a better world as inseparable. **R**

Check Your Stereotypes At The Door

Pance Stojkovski

Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire
Starring Gabourey ‘Gabby’ Sidibe, Mo’Nique. Screenplay by
Geoffrey Fletcher. Directed by Lee Daniels.

There are movies that entertain and there are ‘feel-good’ movies. The new movie *Precious*, by director Lee Daniels does not fall into either category though it has elements of both – depending on one’s outlook. *Precious* has already won a few festival fan awards (including Sundance and TIFF) and is nominated for some major Hollywood awards – but it still has to overcome ticket-buyers fears and critics’ stereotyping.

From the movie poster and reviews, it is obvious that this is not an easy movie about a camera-friendly, easy-on-the-eyes actor or ‘feel-good’ comedy – where one can just sit-back, relax and be entertained. Based on all this, you still have to answer the question – do you really want to watch a film that deals with ‘uncomfortable’ issues.

It is true that the script deals with heavy issues like physical and mental abuse in circumstances of a ‘broken’ family living in poverty. One is reminded of previous trailblazing films that have dealt with similar issues like *Midnight Cowboy* and the lesser known Brazilian film *Pixote*.

Although the decision to see this film might be difficult for some, the viewing experience and the post-movie analysis is rewarding – especially if one views the characters as unique individuals and not stereotypes that represent some identifiable group. We first encounter the central character – Clareece “Precious” Jones (portrayed by newcomer Gabourey Sidibe) – as a young teenager in junior-highschool. She is daydreaming away her time in school in unrealistic dreams in what might be a typical *60 Minutes* expose of an urban ghetto school where the teachers are overworked and the students are ‘streamed’ into graduation. “Precious” is awoken out of this daydream by the school principal who confronts her about possibly being pregnant – again! This is Precious’s second pregnancy and is transferred to an alternative school. In the process of signing up to go to the new alternative school, we learn about Precious’s life at home, and her academic skills (or lack thereof). We learn that the deck is stacked against Precious, and we wonder how she will survive this experience.

Some have criticized the film for following a traditional “triumph over adversity” formula, or even worse, pandering to middle-class prejudices. In this modern day, 21st century sensibility, when record numbers of people are high school and col-

lege graduates, and many people are publishing their own blogs/videos/tweets etc... on the net, are the old standards of film-making still true? Although a ground-breaking movie like *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* could provide a positive example of racial-harmony in 1967, would a modern-day movie with the same simple outlook have resonance today? If a film-maker today errs on the side of assuming an intelligent audience that is capable of discerning right and wrong they will have succeeded in challenging their audience with thought provoking issues. *Precious* is such a movie. It challenges one to think beyond stereotypes, and look at the concrete. After all, the film is called “Precious” – as in ‘loved,’ ‘cherished’ and ultimately ‘unique.’

Even though the central character is a young, black, unwed, teen-mother, she’s not a statistic. She’s a real character with her own unique circumstances. There are many issues she (and the audience) has to deal with. The issue of growing up in poverty is dealt with realistically. Precious is a victim of the system and a victim of incest. In order to survive day-to-day, you have to play the system and get your monthly welfare cheque. But then how do you get out of the welfare cycle?

There is also the issue of dark-skinned and light-skinned blackness. Precious has a recurring dream of a light-skinned boyfriend. What is the role of skin-colour in popular media? How does this affect our own self-image? And how do others view us and judge us?

Parenting is an issue. We learn parenting skills by watching our own parents and using them as positive role-models or as cautionary tales of what not-to-do.

One of the characters in the movie is a one-dimensional antagonist until the last one-third of the movie. We get to see her ‘side’ of the story which then challenges us to question whether she is ‘let off the hook’ for her transgressions or is it character development that adds some dimension and lends realism?

The issue of incest is not often explored in popular culture. This film shines a bright light on incest in a setting of extreme poverty and forces the audience to confront it. (This year’s Oscar celebration praised the film, but there was no mention of the ‘i’ word.) The film does not propose any easy solutions – but we should be able to talk about the issues – and this movie helps to start the discussion. **R**

Pance Stojkovski lives in Toronto.

Let Them Eat Junk: Capitalism and Food

An Interview with Rob Albritton

Rob Albritton's *Let Them Eat Junk: How Capitalism Creates Hunger and Obesity* (2009), published by Arbeiter Ring Press in Canada, and Pluto Press in the UK, offers a welcome and urgently needed analysis of "how the profit fixation of capital has led us deeply into a dangerously unsustainable system of food provision, a system that totally fails when it comes to distributive justice and to human and environmental health" (p. 201). His analysis takes us inside capitalism and shows how its 'deep structures' manage our agricultural and food systems in irrational ways.

Socialist Project recently asked John Simoulidis to interview Robert Albritton about his book and current global struggles to address the failures of our agriculture/food system.

SP: You have written a number of books on Marxist theory and political economy: why a book on food?

RA: When I retired from York University's Political Science Department after teaching political theory and political economy for 36 years, I had more time to do research and writing. Previously most of my work was very theoretical, and I decided it was time to direct my attention to something more down to earth. I had many influences directing my attention toward food, not the least of which was my wife's career teaching food and nutrition at Ryerson University in Toronto. Now that I was retired, I could devote most of my waking hours to researching and writing this book on the food system – a topic that turned out to be far more extensive than my initial expectations. Indeed, the more I researched the topic, the more I discovered the numerous interconnections among our ecological crises, our social and physical health crises, our economic crisis and our global food system. The focus on the impact that capitalism has on food and agriculture is a particularly rich source if we want to make connections between the struggles for socialism and the struggles for ecological sustainability. I hope my book can contribute to a growing wake-up call that will bring about a refocus of human intelligence and material wealth toward reshaping the food system and the capitalist economy that it is embedded in.

SP: There are various and recently published books and articles offering critiques of the corporate control of the food system. What can readers expect to find in your book that is lacking in other critiques?

RA: After 40 years of studying capitalism, I believe that no single work makes more headway in grasping its inner logic and inner dynamic than Marx's *Capital*. It was this work more than any other that guided me in my central aim, which was to understand how capitalism has shaped our food system. It follows that the first difference between this book and others written on the topic of food is that I am not aware of any other food book that explicitly bases its theoretical framework (many do not have theoretical frameworks) on Marx's *Capital*. Second, no other food book has as broad a scope as this one. Third, no other food book has as much factual information. Fourth and finally, the above three points are combined in a way that makes this book the most radical critique of the capitalist food system yet written. This is because it seeks out connections between the food crisis and the other crises of advanced capitalism, and it illustrates that capital's indifference to use-value is particularly destructive when capitalism subsumes and commodifies the food system.

SP: What were some of the most interesting and/or surprising discoveries you made while researching and writing this book?

RA: I was shocked by many things. I'll mention a few. First, I was impressed by the immense power of the sugar industry. Sugar is one of the cheapest, the most addictive, and most profitable of food inputs. As a result more and more of it goes into much of our processed foods, even though it is the prime suspect in the current global diabetes epidemic. Efforts to place constraints on its use have mostly failed, despite a fledgling international "dump soft drinks" campaign led by The Center for Science in the Public Interest. Second, while I knew in a general way that the global distribution of food leaves many people struggling with hunger and malnutrition, I was not aware that globally nearly half the population makes \$2 or less a day, and that approximately one billion people are mentally impaired due to malnutrition. Finally, our food system spreads toxins in the environment; has played the major role in deforestation, the running down of water supplies, and the degradation of land; is a huge contributor to global warming; and is rapidly depleting the remaining reserves of fossil fuels. In short, it not only undermines human health, but also is leading us toward ecological disaster.

SP: What are some of the major themes that you address? What are some of the major failures associated with an agricultural/food system controlled by capital's 'deep structures'?

RA: The title could be misleading without an understanding of the reference to Marie Antoinette's "Let Them Eat Cake." In my interpretation "junk food" epitomizes capitalist food in this phase

of history, and junk food is high in sugars, fats, and salts, while being low in other nutrients. My book does not focus narrowly on junk food, but on a food system whose cutting edge has been junk food and whose largest corporations tend to be centered in the U.S., expanding outward to the rest of the world. The main themes of the book are the food system's failure to advance human health, environmental health, or social justice; and the connections between the food crisis and the myriad of other crises characteristic of late capitalism.

Rational behaviour under capitalism requires that capitalists continually shift production from goods and services that are unprofitable (and will, in due course plunge them into bankruptcy) to goods and services that are profitable. Since competition forces them to maximize short-term profits, it is this quantitative focus and not the quality of use-values that becomes the overriding goal. For example, if a capitalist learns that by adding more sugar to baby food, profits will increase both because sugar is a very cheap input and because babies will eat more baby food and later adults will eat more sugar, then a rational capitalist would do this, despite many studies that show a craving for sugar that borders on addiction can be established very early in children through a diet of sugar dense foods. The capitalist cannot afford to be concerned with the lifetime of obesity and connected illnesses that such a diet might generate. In short, in order to be rational, a capitalist needs to focus on profits (quantity) and not the quality of life of humans (or use-values) unless that quality can be easily converted into profits. Similarly, if the market for palm oil is profitable, and the easiest way to expand its production is to cut down the remaining rainforests of South East Asia, then a rational capitalist would not hesitate to do this. Finally, if capitalist farmers profit from paying low wages to undocumented field workers, then any capitalist farmer who does not do this is likely to lose out to the competition. Unfortunately these and many other destructive trends are all too current.

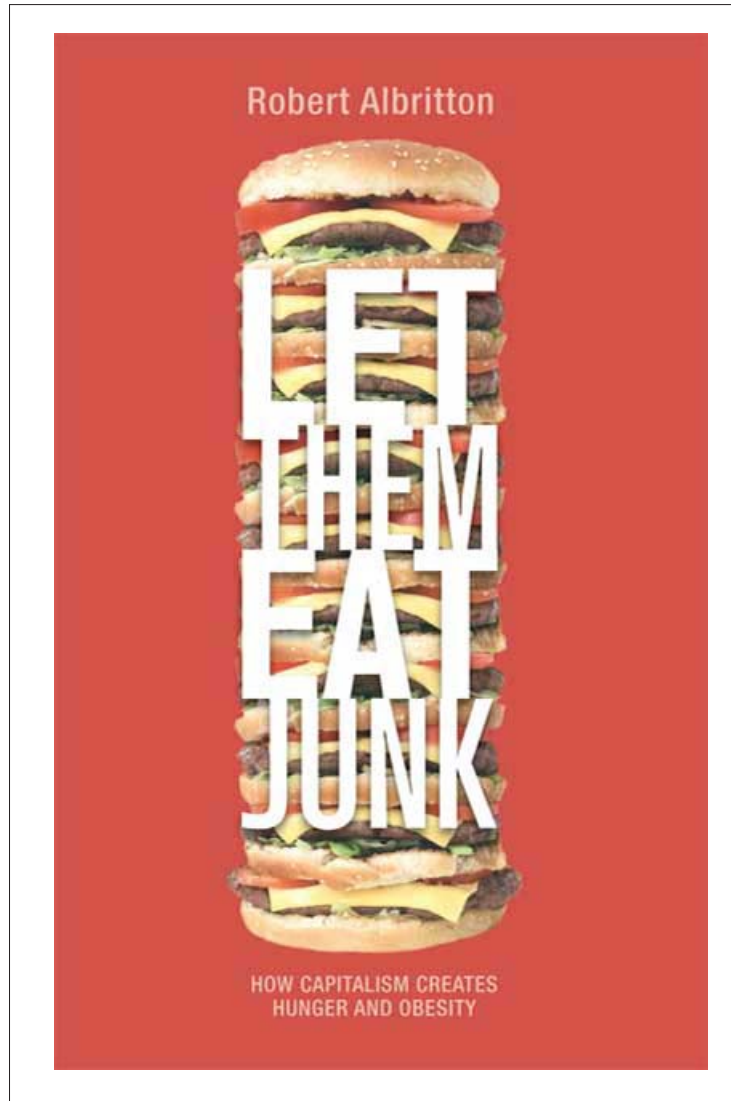
SP: How does the crisis in the food system relate to the broader economic and ecological crises of the current phase of neoliberal capitalism? How will its impacts be felt and distributed globally?

RA: The food crisis feeds the other crises which in turn feed it. The American food system is so dependent upon fossil fuels that it has been estimated that all known fossil fuel reserves would be exhausted in seven years were the whole world to adopt the U.S. system. Indeed, at approximately one-third of the total, the food system contributes more to global warming than any other sector of the economy. At the same time global warming will reduce crop yields due to extreme weather and higher temperatures. Further, to mention only two of the many causes of pollution: the massive petro-chemical inputs of agriculture coupled with the

pollution of bodies of fresh water by confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) make the capitalist food system a major contributor to the toxification of the environment, which is now reaching alarming levels. Finally, given the petroleum dependency of the food system, the price of food will go up with the price of petroleum, and the use of food crop land for ethanol production will only push food prices yet higher. Declining yields due to global warming and extreme weather will also increase food prices. Without action now these price increases will soon be disastrous for the 40 percent of global population that lives on \$2 or less a day.

SP: Your reply addresses how capitalism creates hunger. Can you explain how it at the same time produces obesity?

RA: The producers of junk food that profit from the ease with which people become quasi-addicted to sugar, fat, and salt provide consumers with lots of calories but few nutrients. Hooked on junk food and lacking the income to afford more nutritious food, people consume too many calories and not enough nutrients. This is a recipe for obesity, a weakened immune system, and ultimately illness and death. A report published by the American Medical Association claims that if current practices continue, one-third of American children born in the year 2000 will get diabetes. Even more serious than what some have called the "pandemic of obesity," is the hunger and malnutrition suffered by over a billion people in the world. It has been estimated



that during each half hour an average of 360 children under the age of five die of starvation or hunger-related illnesses.

SP: Perhaps the most challenging part of your book for readers not familiar with Marx's Capital or the Unoist approach that informs your theoretical work concerns the two chapters in Part II of your book where you provide an outline of 'capitalism in the abstract and general' and 'consumerism' as a phase of capitalism. Can you elaborate briefly on why this kind of theoretical work is necessary in order to understand the global and local failures of the agriculture/food system?

RA: The more abstract level of analysis clarifies the basic features of fully developed capitalism: showing how it subsumes social relations while deepening and expanding itself. Capital's abstract dynamic is present in history to the extent that capitalism is. At the same time capital is constrained and/or supported by historically specific structures and agencies that shape it and are shaped by it. The abstract level of analysis brings out the reasons why even when capitalism is functioning at its competitive best, its management of a fully capitalist agricultural/food system is likely to manifest significant contradictions and irrationalities. My mid-range level of analysis illustrates the form that these irrationalities take in the phase of consumerism after World War II. Finally, these two higher levels of analysis help us to understand the evolving food system over the past twenty years or so. One can easily list large numbers of alarming facts about current tendencies associated with the capitalist food system, but theory helps us to weigh the importance of the facts, to understand their interconnections, and hence to understand the most important forces shaping and being shaped by the food system. The better we understand how the current system operates, the more effective our strategies of transformation.

SP: You describe the current phase of capitalism in terms of a 'capitalist command economy.' Can you briefly explain what this means and how it frames the issues you raise in the concluding chapter of your book on 'the fight for democracy, social justice, health and sustainability'?

RA: The food industry always emphasizes the enormous choice it offers the modern consumer, but this is an illusion. First of all because most people in the world are too poor to buy any but the cheapest of foods. Second, those that have the money are confronted with a huge array of processed foods that are largely rearrangements of soy, corn, fat, sugar, and salt. If you are allergic to GM soy, you will have to avoid the majority of processed foods since so many of them contain soy and soy by-products, and there is no labelling requirement for GMOs. Third, food indoctrination is so widespread and powerful that most food choices are already heavily conditioned by the toxic food environment and its powerful marketing techniques. Fourth, nearly all foods in the typical supermarket are the products of a few huge corporations (for example, Nestlé and Kraft).

During the "cold war," western economists often sharply contrasted "totalitarian command economies," characteristic of

the communist bloc, with "free market economies," characteristic of the capitalist bloc. Today, the world capitalist economy ought to be labelled a "corporate command economy," because large corporations run by small elites have way too much unaccountable power to command the future of humanity. Markets are now largely planning instruments utilized by corporations for creating both supply and demand. Large profits are made even when much larger social costs (externalities not included in market prices) will need to be paid by taxpayers and future generations. While in reality most markets have never worked as pictured by the ideal of optimality that many economists have presupposed, now this ideal is so deeply ingrained that it can still be used to justify "free markets" when in reality we more and more see the corporate use of markets as planning mechanisms to maximize their short-term profits while creating huge long-range costs to society. These social costs can be viewed as debts that future generations will have to pay whether they are economic debts, ecological debts, or health debts.

We need to turn this around, and we need to do it fast. This will require clearing our minds of the free market myth, so that we can begin to consciously use markets as democratic planning mechanisms to advance human and environmental well-being. Besides democratizing markets, we also need to democratize corporations and governments. Democratizing corporations means making their decision making transparent so that they can be held accountable by the public. The first step in democratizing governments is to find ways of preventing them being held for ransom by giant corporations.

In the current circumstances, it is particularly important to democratize the labour market. There will always be unmet social needs, and therefore, there should always be jobs to meet those needs. Existing labour markets are extremely ineffective ways of mobilizing human energies to meet human needs. Computer technology could be utilized to find new ways of prioritizing social needs and of mobilizing the human intelligence and material wealth to meet them. Anyone who wants to work and is able to work should never be unemployed unless it is to gain skills needed to meet particular needs, and such education should be subsidized.

Finally, and this will perhaps be the most difficult, we need to find ways to redistribute wealth globally in order to advance the equality that is necessary for democracy to be effective, and for freedom to have any meaning. Democratizing markets, corporations, and governments is, in my opinion, not a "middle way" that compromises its soul to neoliberalism, it is the best way forward that I can think of – a way that offers a just and humane way out of the myriad of crises that confront us. **R**

Rob Albritton is Professor Emeritus at York University and the author of *Economics Transformed: Discovering the Brilliance of Marx* (2007) and contributed an article to the recent issue of Socialist Register (2010): *Morbid Symptoms: Health Under Capitalism*.

Capitalism Against Health

Socialist Register 2010: Morbid Symptoms: Health Under Capitalism

Edited by Leo Panitch and Colin Leys

Merlin Press, London; Monthly Review Press, New York; Fernwood Publishing, Halifax. www.socialistregister.com

Review by Andy Coates.

The snake on the Staff of Asclepius has twisted the symbol of the healing arts into a dollar sign. This cartoon announces the *Socialist Register 2010*, as the annual publication begins its 46th year with vigor. Edited by Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *Morbid Symptoms: Health under Capitalism* boldly proposes that it is possible “to make the fundamental contradiction of health under capitalism the pivotal issue of a revitalised socialist strategy.” The work will raise consciousness and in the best tradition of scientific socialism, compel political action.

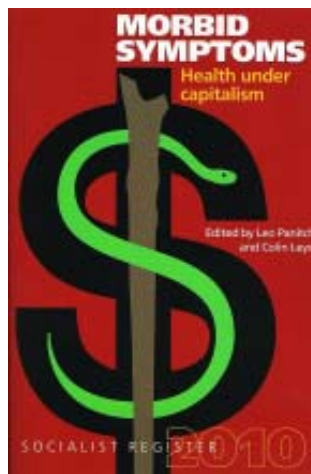
The 17 essays present rigorous social science. The topics extend from “commodification versus solidarity” to medical TV dramas, from “the practices of big pharma” to China’s need to restore universal access to health care, from neoliberal economics in India to Cuba’s health politics, from “the shaping of global health policy” to “mental health in a sick society.” So many of the articles will inspire discussion among group of caregivers – or health reform advocates – or trade unionists – or for that matter all with interest in the contemporary issues of health and caregiving. The impressions here catalogue several insights found in *Morbid Symptoms*, but regrettably fall far short of an adequate summary of any one essay.

The lead essay by Colin Leys fixes several contradictions. The enormous increase in life expectancy in England between 1870 and 1950 boosted the falsehood that “capitalism promotes health.” Through an elegant synopsis of the contradictory results of science under capitalism, Leys discloses how “mortality revolution” came about – not from better nutrition, not from rising incomes – but from the construction of sewers and water mains and the regulation of housing and food. A set of sanitation reforms won in spite of opposition by capitalists.

“The sanitation movement that sparked the mortality revolution in England was, then, hardly an achievement, in the sense of an intended effect, of capitalism,” Leys writes, “any more than the Russian revolution was an achievement of the Czarist autocracy, or the Indian independence an achievement of the British Raj. The sanitation movement that produced the mortality revolution was a reaction against the social costs of capitalism, not a benefit that the capitalist class sought to confer.”

The majority of Leys’ essay, like *Morbid Symptoms* as a whole, presents data that reveal the unnecessary cruelty that profit-seeking imposes upon us. The drive to commodify human health, justified by false promises of cost-containment and efficiency,

leaves neoliberal ideology progressively disconnected from reality. In the context of the present economic crisis, Leys concludes, a “new common sense” can emerge. “The situation,” he writes, “has all the makings of Gramsci’s definition of an ‘organic’ crisis, a ‘real crisis of ruling class hegemony’.”



Examples of contradictions noted in *Morbid Symptoms*: Kalman Applbaum reminds us that thanks to marketing “the managerial techniques and outlooks of private industry have been widely adopted by public sector providers.” The corporate defense of intellectual property rights, Meri Koivusalo recounts, has managed to become a priority for global public health policy, thanks to the influence of private agencies. Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong note that thanks to the reverberating effort to commodify health services

in Canada, evidence-based medicine has been co-opted from a tool to support patient-centered decision-making to a means to control physicians’ and nurses’ workdays. Robert Albritton, writing “Between obesity and hunger,” contrasts the drive for profits by giant food corporations of the United States with the vast environmental damage they have wrought and with the rising incidence of hunger and starvation, with a disproportionate toll among women, across the globe.

In “Maternal mortality in Africa: a gendered lens on health system failure,” Paula Tibandebage and Maureen Macintosh write: “Charges for both publicly and privately provided services create a barrier to access in time of need and generate further impoverishment. Exclusion from health care thereby becomes not only a generator of poverty but also a defining aspect of the experience of being poor. To be sent away from a health facility without care when you or a child is ill is truly to know how poor you are.”

Tibandebage and Macintosh report that “the chance that a 15-year-old woman will die of maternal causes” in Sub-Saharan Africa “was estimated at 1 in 26 in 2005, and in Niger, the worst case, 1 in 7. In Ireland, the lowest-risk country, it was 1 in 48,000.” They rivet how marketization of health care – together with a public sector “gender bias against the health needs of women of child-bearing age” – worsened the entirely preventable crisis in obstetric care. Maternal mortality in Tanzania actually *increased* over the decade that began in the mid-1990s. Growing out-of-pocket expenses that especially burden rural women, including transportation costs as well as new fees introduced as health services are commodified together, simply could not be paid.

Illustrating how organizing around specific human needs can lead to “building a comprehensive public health movement,” Sanjay Basu writes of the “critical lesson” of organizing around HIV/AIDS that “community mobilization and attention to global health, is capable of dramatically expanding the availability of funds and their appropriate use, as well as what is considered ‘possible’ in resource-denied settings in terms of public health and medical delivery programs.”

Julie Feinsilver delivers an overview of health politics in Cuba. “More than any other government, Cuba’s leaders consider health indicators, particularly the infant mortality rate and life expectancy at birth, to be measures of government effectiveness,” she writes. “As a result, the health of the population becomes a metaphor for the health of the body politic.” Cuba’s traditions now include community self-reliance and health system experimentation, more doctors per person than any other nation (twice that in the U.S.), an official and public emphasis on the social determinants of health, and international “medical diplomacy.” Feinsilver is by no means uncritical, explaining that emphasis on health benefits the government but also, in terms of government legitimacy, carries significant risks. She notes the authoritarian implications of sending Cuban women “with high-risk pregnancies, or who live far from an appropriate institution in which to give birth” to special maternity homes for the last weeks of pregnancy, a result of the government obsession over “any infant death.”

Feinsilver also explores the legitimacy Cuba has earned through international medical diplomacy. “Overall since 1961, Cuba has conducted medical diplomacy with 103 countries,” she enumerates, “deploying 113,585 medical professionals abroad. As of April 2008 over 30,000 Cuban medical personnel were collaborating in 74 countries across the globe. Cuban data indicate that Cuban medical personnel abroad have saved more than 1.6 million lives, treated over 85 million patients (of which more than 19.5 million were seen on ‘house calls’ at patients’ homes, schools, jobs, etc.), performed 2.2 million operations, assisted 768,858 births, and vaccinated with complete dosages more than 9.2 million people.” She reminds us too of Cuba’s contributions to disaster relief, including the provision of “a team of highly experienced disaster relief specialists, comprising 2,564 doctors (57 percent), nurses and medical technicians” to Pakistan after the earthquake there in 2005.

Shauoguang Wang also incorporates the idea that health plays a crucial role in the legitimacy of the government of China, “a country that still professes to uphold the socialist principle of equity.” Wang asks: “Why, with higher disposable income per capita, better nourishment, and a bigger proportion of its national income devoted to health and health care, has China’s health performance been so disappointing in the reform era?” His answer: socioeconomic inequality has worsened. For example, Wang shows that between 1998 and 2003 illness emerged as the leading cause of rural poverty in China.

In “Inequality and health” David Coburn synthesizes international trends. “The balance of class forces,” Coburn writes, “lies

behind both national differences in health status, and the inequality in health within nations.”

Several essays in *Morbid Symptoms* augment Coburn’s analysis. Among them, Mohan Rao traces how, in India, worsening inequalities result from “policies that reflect an ideological commitment to unbridled market principles” thanks to the influence of organizations like the World Bank. And Christoph Hermann writes that privatization in Europe, has caused “erosion of the redistribution built into the Bismarck and Beveridge systems of public healthcare financing.” In Europe as elsewhere out-of-pocket payments and private insurance premiums are economically regressive, Robin-Hood-in-reverse penalties upon people with low incomes. Privatization increases costs and undermines quality. In Germany Hermann writes, “national statistics show that private hospitals in Germany tend to operate with lower ratios of staff to beds.”

Rodney Loeppky teaches that, as new centers of capital accumulation, health industries employ pragmatism and flexibility with respect to local institutions. Efforts to privatize and marketize run up against “political realities, including widespread extra-economic attachment by local populations to the institutions that provide care. This is why the specific forms these institutions take constitute the industry’s most serious strategic concern.” Loeppky’s exposition gives us hope, for the vital point emerges that local resistance can have profound, global, implication. Community struggles against hospital mergers and closings, a worldwide phenomenon, come to mind.

Marie Gottschalk writes that “Time and again major attempts to reform the U.S. health system fall victim to the ‘Stockholm syndrome’ – like the famous Swedish bank hostages who became emotionally attached to their captors and even defended them after they were released.” Writing in mid-2009 Gottschalk offers not only a brilliant metaphor but remarkable prescience: “If they calculated that the political conditions were not fortuitous to secure a single-payer plan, at least they might have pushed for a seriously regulated insurance system,” she warns. “Failure to attempt even that is perilous for the cause of universal health care and for their political futures. The president and the Democrats risk looking in a couple of years like Herbert Hoover and the Republicans on the eve of their historic 1932 defeat rather than FDR and the Democrats on their march to a triumphant re-election in 1936.”

“Health care today,” Leo Panitch writes on the back cover, “is the object of struggle between commercial forces seeking to make it a field of capital accumulation, and popular forces fighting to keep it – or make it – a public service with equal access for all.” *Morbid Symptoms: Health under Capitalism* will be studied, and indeed enjoyed, and also help stir political action, far beyond the worldwide community of socialist-minded activists and scholars. Let us hope that its timeliness encourages its circulation, for these essays deserve the widest possible readership and discussion. Thanks to a wide-ranging and popular presentation of complex social facts, this volume is essential. **R**

The Burj Khalifa:

Capital Excess Coupled with Excessive Worker Exploitation

Nancy LaPlante

January 4, 2010 - The Burj Dubai, the world's tallest building was opened with impressive light and sound shows as well as a breath-taking fireworks demonstration. This structural marvel was renamed the Burj Khalifa for Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed who had provided an \$80-billion bailout for Dubai, the United Arab Emirate state which had been heavily in debt. While the current economic crisis stalls the sucking out of any immediate and enormous profits from this tower of capitalist overindulgence, the brutality in its history of construction puts directly side-by-side the lavish gluttony of the bourgeoisie against the expendable lives of the workers who built it. While there are many incredible details about the Burj Khalifa only a few are named here, followed by a brief tip-of-the-iceberg list of the examples of worker exploitation and their attempts to fight back against their severe exploitation.

THE BURJ KHALIFA IN NUMBERS

- World's tallest skyscraper at 828m
- Building with the most floors - 160
- Cost \$1.5-billion (U.S.) to build
- World's fastest elevators at speed of 64 km/h
- 28,261 glass panels on the outside of the building
- Can hold up to 25,000 people at any one time
- Outside fountain system cost \$217-million (U.S.). Illuminated by 6,600 lights and 50 coloured projectors, it is 275m long and shoots water 150m into the air, accompanied by a range of classical to contemporary Arabic and world music.
- Office space rents for more than \$43,000 (U.S.) per square metre

The building's website states that the Burj Khalifa is a monument of the can-do spirit of Dubai and international teamwork and is the new guiding beacon of the Middle East. This tower is a beacon for

capital to invest and the uber-rich to wallow in luxury as well as a beacon for the working class to travel thousands of miles away from their homes in search of any wage they can forage.

This architectural masterpiece equates to pure misery for the workers who built it:

- Constructed mainly by workers from South Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, China and Sri Lanka). Travelling to a foreign place in order to be able to house and feed their families hundreds of thousands of workers forgo literally their life for the paltry wages because these paltry wages are better than no wages. In many cases, it means no wages as companies withhold pay often for months at a time and due to the heavy debt of repaying recruitment agencies from back home.
- Carpenters earn wages of approximately £4.34 (UK) per day and labourers earned £2.84 (UK) per day. The average monthly income of the migrant labourer is \$175 per month while the per capita monthly income in Dubai is \$2106. Not only were wages disgustingly low tantamount to pure slavery, but the workers owed recruitment agencies for their jobs and it took years to pay them back.
- It is reported that the construction took 22 million man hours. They have had no choice but to surrender to the capitalist system in order to survive, to toil and sweat and give their blood for capital.
- Employers confiscate passports; in addition to wages being stolen from them, the workers even lose their identities and rights to move freely in the world. They are held captive to stay and continue to work rather than being able to return home empty-pocketed and still in debt.
- Migrant workers numbering higher than the local population are housed in

abysmal conditions. One worker was quoted as saying:

"The latrines are so filthy we cannot use them, we are so disgusted. The roads are full of garbage and waterlogged. Living and moving about here is a great problem. We suffer greatly."

- There is a shortage of drinking water; workers are frequently getting ill from drinking the dirty water provided.
- Employer-owned labour camps where workers are forced to live frequently do not have electricity or running water.
- Construction workers toil 14 hour workdays with heavy debt and few to no breaks during midday heat.
- Over the years as this tower was being built, the workers struggled a number of times.
- 2004 – Workers protested at the Ministry of Labour only to be oppressed by the police and threatened with mass deportations.
- September 2005 – largest worker protest and strike in United Arab Emirates history.
- March 2006 – Approximately 2,500 workers were waiting for buses to take them back to their living quarters at the end of the day when guards began to harass them. The workers fought back smashing company cars, computer and construction equipment; inflicting approximately \$1-million in damage. Workers at the nearby Burj Dubai airport laid down their tools and held a strike in support of these workers. The following day the Burj Dubai workers strike against their employer demanding better wages, better medical care and improved treatment from their foremen.

- June 2007 – A worker fell to his death from the 130th floor to the 108th floor.

- October 2007 – Four thousand workers are imprisoned for 6 months and then deported for involvement in a protest demanding better pay and working conditions.

- November 2007 – bridge collapses at a construction site killing seven and injuring 15 workers.

- December 2009 – an Indian family of three committed suicide due to their financial misery in Dubai.

- January 2010 – a Sri Lankan hotel employee committed suicide; he had been having problems with company management over his end-of-service agreements and his air ticket back home.

The Burj Khalifa is a notorious example among many of the exploitative system of capitalism, at the heart of it the necessity of the working class to work for wages. The luxury for the rich in this tower was built with the sweat and blood of the working class. While there have been many criticisms of the treatment of the pitifully-paid workers, these do not go far enough. It does not take long to dig to the root of the issue here; capitalism is the system that facilitates the exploitation of workers for profits. As long as there is a constant struggle between capital and labour, a working class resistance ensues.

In the case of the Burj Khalifa, this white elephant is a clear example of capitalist exploitation and that its foundation of wage-labour is the offender. With billions unemployed around the world, it is no wonder at all, that millions migrate to any job at all, desperate to eke out a living. Figuratively speaking, even the dorms at this “beacon of the Middle East” are probably worth more than the labour power of these workers. The demands of the workers over the period of building the Burj Khalifa were a spit in the ocean compared to the wealth of the ruling class who financed this project, however, it is vital to consider that these workers were work-

ing and living not only in physically deplorable conditions but were at the mercy of their employers who often withheld their pay, held onto their passports and repeatedly threatened deportation; and despite all of this intimidation, the anger of the workers surfaced and exploded. As capital morphs and tyrannizes, so too the working class must connect and fight back against a system that enslaves them to wages. **R**

Nancy LaPlante is from Toronto, Ontario and the editor and contributor to *Against Wage-Labour* (www.againstwage.com).



A Forgotten Chapter in the Working Class Fight for Democratic Rights

Ian Angus

November 5, 2009, is the 215th anniversary of the acquittal of Thomas Hardy on charges of High Treason. Hardy is nearly forgotten today, but for decades workers and democrats in England celebrated November 5 every year as the anniversary of a major victory, a triumph over a powerful state that had deployed immense resources to crush working class organizations and suppress popular demands for democratic rights.

Thomas Hardy was born in Scotland on March 3, 1752, the son of a sailor who died at sea when Thomas was eight. He moved to London in 1774, where he worked as a shoemaker, a trade he had learned from his grandfather.

Only a tiny minority of working people in the 1790s worked in anything we would recognize as a factory. A Marxist historian writes, “the characteristic industrial worker worked not in a mill or factory but (as an artisan or ‘mechanic’) in a small workshop or in his own home” (Thompson 259)

Thomas Hardy was one of those artisans. After working for others for 17 years, he opened his own small shop in Piccadilly in 1791. As he later wrote, the experience of trying to set up a shop in economic hard times forced him to think. The country was rich and the people worked hard – so why was it so difficult to make ends meet?

“It required no extraordinary penetration, once the enquiry was begun, to be able to trace it to the corrupt practices of men falsely calling themselves the representatives of the people, but who were, in fact, selected by a comparatively few influential individuals, who preferred their own particular aggrandizement to the general interest of the community.

“The next enquiry naturally arose – Was the cause of the people hopeless? Must they and their posterity for ever groan under this intolerable load? Could not the nation, by a proper use of its moral powers, set itself free?” (Hardy, 10)

England in the eighteenth century was not by any stretch of the imagination a democracy. Large landowners were firmly in charge, and the entire system was grossly corrupt. It was government of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich.

“There were a few constituencies where perhaps 10 per cent of the male electorate could vote, but these were easily outnumbered by the ‘rotten boroughs,’ where the Member was effectively nominated by his patron, a lord or a landowner or both. The quarter of the population which lived in urban areas was entirely unrepresented – the franchise was still based on voting in counties and in rural ar-

reas. No more than 4 per cent of the male population was entitled to vote, and most of those either didn’t vote, or voted according to how much they were bribed or patronized.” (Foot, 46)

‘ANOTHER CLASS OF PEOPLE’

There had been many middle-class and even aristocratic political reform societies in England before, but Hardy proposed something different: “a Society of *another class of the people*, to effect that most desirable and necessary Reform, which had baffled the united associations of men of the greatest talents, worth, and consequence in the nation.” (Hardy 103. emphasis added)

The result, formed on January 25, 1792 by “eight plain, homely, and obscure citizens,” was the London Corresponding Society. Hardy was elected Secretary and Treasurer at the first meeting.

The LCS was determined to be an organization for and of working people. Dues were just one penny a week. Branches – limited to 30 members each, to encourage full participation and discussion – met weekly in working class pubs in various parts of London and the surrounding towns. When a sympathetic member of parliament joined, he was welcomed, but not allowed to chair a meeting, lest the LCS be seen as allied with the Whigs. Hardy wrote:

“We were so scrupulous about the admission of any of those of the higher ranks that when any of them offered to pay more than we usually demanded on the admission of a new member we would not receive it.” (quoted in Thale, 8)

The Society grew to 25 members in two weeks, and to 2,000 in six months. Its office, in Hardy’s shoe shop, became the hub for communication and coordination among similar organizations of artisans, “mechanics,” and small tradesmen in throughout England, Scotland and Wales, all devoted to campaigning for universal suffrage and annual elections. They saw those objectives not as ends in themselves, but as a step toward ending poverty and hunger.

For the rest of the decade, until it was formally outlawed by an Act of Parliament, the London Corresponding Society was the largest, best known, and (to the ruling class) most notorious working class organization in England. At its peak in 1795, it organized public meetings in London attended by 100,000 people and was in communication with similar groups in over 100 cities and towns.

Although the LCS focused on Parliamentary reform, it also

campaign against the war that Britain was waging, in alliance with Europe's worst despots, to overthrow France's revolutionary government. Members of the LCS and other reform groups across the country were also actively involved in the nascent trade union movement and in widespread protests against high food prices during the famine of 1794-95.

REPRESSION

The British ruling class was outraged at the very idea that the "swinish multitude," as conservative ideologue Edmond Burke called them, might play any role in politics. In the House of Lords, a Bishop sputtered that "he did not know what the mass of the people in any country had to do with the laws but to obey them." (Soloway, 63)

Such gross class prejudice wasn't limited to reactionaries. Christopher Wyvill, a Yorkshire landowner and prominent advocate of limited Parliamentary reform, warned in 1792 that "the right of Suffrage communicated to an ignorant and ferocious Populace would lead to tumult and confusion." Referring to the popularity of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* among the radicals, he wrote:

"If Mr. Paine should be able to rouse up the lower classes, their interference will probably be marked by wild work, and all we now possess, whether in private property, or public liberty, will be at the mercy of a lawless and furious rabble." (quoted in Thompson 26)

Early in 1792 the government embarked on a campaign that combined anti-democratic propaganda with outright repression, to force worker democrats off the political stage. It financed mass distribution of anti-radical newspapers and pamphlets, accused the radicals of being paid agents of France, and (through Anglican Bishops, who owed their lucrative posts to the Cabinet) instructed the clergy to preach that supporters of the democratic movement would surely go to hell. At the same time, it encouraged "Church and King" mobs to attack or intimidate radical meetings, denied licenses to pub-owners who rented meeting rooms to radicals, and sent spies and provocateurs into radical societies.

In June 1792, Tom Paine was charged with seditious libel for the views expressed in *Rights of Man*. He escaped to France, but was tried and convicted in his absence, and *Rights of Man* was banned.

In Edinburgh in 1793, three men, including LCS chairman Maurice Margarot, were charged with sedition – consisting of arguing for parliamentary reform and opposing the war with France. After trial before an openly hostile judge, they were sentenced to 14 years "transportation" – exile and compulsory labour in Australia.

A SHOW TRIAL AT OLD BAILEY

On May 12, 1794, Hardy and eleven other leading figures in the reform movement were arrested. The police ransacked Hardy's

home while his pregnant wife lay in bed. They took him first to jail and then to the Parliament buildings, where he was interrogated for several days by a committee that included the Prime Minister and several senior cabinet ministers. Two weeks later, Parliament passed a bill suspending *Habeas Corpus*, thus allowing the government to imprison the twelve in the Tower of London without charge for several months.

While he was in prison, a reactionary mob (Hardy believed they were paid and organized by the government) attacked Hardy's home, breaking the windows and threatening to set the building on fire. His wife escaped through a small back window, but the physical and emotional strain had fatal effects: on August 27 her baby was stillborn, and she died a few hours later.

On October 6, a handpicked Grand Jury charged the twelve men with "High Treasons and Misprisions of Treasons, against the person and authority of the King." If convicted, each would be hanged, drawn and quartered – "hanged by the neck, cut down while still alive, disembowelled (and his entrails burned before his face) and then beheaded and quartered." (Thompson, p. 21)

Hardy was the first in the dock, because, he later wrote, he "was supposed to be the most helpless of this band." (Hardy, 110) The government threw unprecedented resources into prosecuting him.

"The trial of Thomas Hardy was the longest and most expensive trial for high treason that had ever been heard in Britain. The prosecution case was conducted by no less than eight barristers, led by the Attorney-General Sir John Scott and the Solicitor-General Sir John Mitford Four judges sat with [Chief Justice] Eyre on the bench ...

"The trial began on Tuesday 28 October 1794, and continued, with a break on Sunday, until Wednesday 5 November; no previous trial had lasted more than twenty-four hours, from the reading of the indictment to the delivery of the verdict....

"Scott's opening speech, 100,000 words long, took nine hours to deliver." (Barrell, 318, 324)

But despite all the money and time they devoted, the prosecution's case was weak. They had masses of documents and the testimony of spies and turncoats, but none of it demonstrated treason. In essence, their argument was that campaigning for political reform was equivalent to plotting to overthrow and murder the King. The prosecutors seem to have hoped that the conservative biases of a jury of property-owners would prejudice them against a working class radical who was challenging the right of property to rule.

The strategy failed. Shortly before the trial, noted political philosopher William Godwin published an essay that effectively demolished the legal basis for equating political reform with treason. It was so widely-read and influential that one of the lawyers for the prosecution denied in court that the case depended on any such argument. Hardy's lawyer, Thomas Erskine, was devastating in his cross-examination of government witnesses and in his final summation.

After nine long days of trial, on November 5 the jury took only three hours to decide unanimously that Hardy was not guilty. Hardy tried to leave the building quietly, but a huge crowd of supporters surrounded his carriage, released the horses, and pulled him through the streets cheering. At his request they took him to the cemetery, where they waited quietly while he visited his wife's grave for the first time.

Apparently believing that the Hardy verdict was a fluke, the government proceeded with treason charges against Hardy's colleagues. The trial of John Horne Tooke, a long-time moderate reformer, lasted five days; that of John Thelwall, the best-known and most popular LCS speaker, lasted three. Both were acquitted. Humiliated, the government withdrew all charges against the remaining nine radical leaders.

The show trial was part of a deliberate plan to crush the reform movement and to deny working people any role in politics. Hardy was told by a source he trusted that the government had 800 other warrants prepared – 300 of them already signed – that it planned to execute as soon as it won guilty verdicts. That plan was defeated, a major setback for reaction in England.

Thomas Hardy's acquittal was a victory for the radical movement, but it was devastating for him personally. His wife had died while he was in prison; his shop and home had been destroyed; the defence had cost him every cent he had. Reading between the lines in the *Memoir* he published years later, it seems that the experience left him emotionally drained, if not shattered. For over 30 years Hardy was a regular participant in the annual dinners celebrating the acquittals of 1794, but he never again played an active role in politics.

THE FIRST WORKER REVOLUTIONARIES

Hardy and his comrades were not socialists. Socialist ideas didn't yet exist, nor did the social forces that would make socialism possible. The radicals of the 1790s drew inspiration from the French Revolution, from the century-old traditions of the Levelers, and above all from Tom Paine, whose book *Rights of Man* sold an unprecedented 200,000 copies in 1792-93. Socially the radicals favoured something akin to the 20th century welfare state. Politically they were radical democrats. Many of their demands weren't won until well into the twentieth century, and some still aren't on the books.

In their time, they were revolutionaries. As a recent historian writes:

“In the context of England's socio-economic and political structures in the 1790s, democratic ideology pivoting on manhood suffrage had revolutionary implications. How could a society which so ostentatiously hinged on the very unequal distribution of wealth, bolstered by a political system excluding all but the very rich, survive the implementation or imposition of democracy?” (Wells, 133)

After the acquittals of 1794, it took the Pitt government several years to suppress Britain's first authentic working class move-

ment. It was able to do so only by passing draconian laws that greatly expanded the grounds for charges of treason, outlawed any meeting of more than 50 people, suspended *Habeas Corpus*, and finally banned all trade unions and the London Corresponding Society itself in 1799.

Even then, the radicals were only driven underground. As E.P. Thompson showed in his monumental study *The Making of the English Working Class*, the tradition of working class resistance to oppression remained strong. When mass protests broke out in 1815-1819, they built on the traditions and ideas of the 1790s and were led by many of the same people.

“Throughout the war years there were Thomas Hardys in every town and in many villages throughout England, with a kist or shelf full of Radical books, biding their time, putting in a word at the tavern, the chapel, the smithy, the shoemaker's shop, waiting for the movement to revive. And the movement for which they waited did not belong to gentlemen, manufacturers, or rate-payers; it was their own.” (Thompson, 201)

Those radicals kept the spirit of 1794 alive in the hardest times of ruling class repression and working class retrenchment. In tribute to them, the victory of November 5, 1794 should be remembered today, and Thomas Hardy surely deserves to be restored to his rightful place in the pantheon of working class heroes. **R**

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Ideas for the Struggle: On Revolutionary Organization

Marta Harnecker

I. REVOLTS OR REVOLUTIONS? THE ROLE OF THE POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

1. The recent popular uprisings at the turn of the 21st century that have rocked numerous countries such as Argentina and Bolivia – and, more generally, the history of the multiple social explosions that have occurred in Latin America and the rest of the world – have undoubtedly demonstrated that the initiative of the masses, in and of itself, is not enough to defeat ruling regimes.

2. Impoverished urban and rural masses, lacking a well-defined plan, have risen up, seized highways, towns and neighbourhoods, ransacked stores and stormed parliaments, but despite achieving the mobilisation of hundreds of thousands of people, neither their size nor their combativeness have been enough to develop from popular revolt into revolution. They have overthrown presidents, but they haven't been able to conquer power and initiate a process of deep social transformations.

3. On the other hand, the history of triumphant revolutions clearly demonstrates what can be achieved when there is a political instrument capable of raising an alternative national program that unifies the struggles of diverse social actors behind a common goal; that helps to cohere them and elaborate a path forward for these actors based on an analysis of the existent balance of forces. Only in this manner can actions be carried out at the right place and right time, always seeking out the weakest link in the enemy's chain.

4. This political instrument is like a piston that compresses steam at the decisive moment and – without wasting any energy – converts it into a powerful force.

5. In order for political action to be effective, so that protests, resistance and struggles are really able to change things, to convert revolts into revolutions, a political instrument capable of overcoming the dispersion and fragmentation of the exploited and the oppressed is required, one that can create spaces to bring together those who, in spite of their differences, have a common enemy; that is able to strengthen existing struggles and promote others by orientating their actions according to a thorough analysis of the political situation; that can act as an instrument for cohering the many expressions of resistance and struggle.

6. We are aware that many are apprehensive toward such ideas. There are many who are not even willing to discuss them. Such positions are adopted because they associate this idea with the anti-democratic, authoritarian, bureaucratic and manipulating political practices that have characterised many left parties.

7. I believe it is fundamental that we overcome this subjective barrier and understand that when we refer to a political instrument, we are not thinking of just any political instrument, we are dealing with political instrument adjusted to the new times, an instrument that we must build together.

8. However, in order to create or remodel this new political instrument, the left has to change its political culture and its vision of politics. This cannot be reduced to institutional political disputes for control over parliament or local governments; to approving laws or winning elections. In this conception of politics, the popular sectors and their struggles are completely ignored. Neither can politics be limited to the art of what is possible.

9. For the left, politics must be the art of making possible the impossible. And we are not talking about a voluntarist declaration. We are talking about understanding politics as the art of constructing a social and political force capable of changing the balance of force in favour of the popular movement, so as to make possible in the future that which today appears impossible.

10. We have to think of politics as the art of constructing forces. We have to overcome the old and deeply-rooted mistake of trying to build a political force without building a social force.

11. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of revolutionary phasemongering among our militants; too much radicalism in their statements. I am convinced that the only way to radicalise a given situation is through the construction of forces. Those whose words are filled with demands for radicalisation must answer the following question: What are you doing to construct the political and social force necessary to push the process forward?

12. But this construction of forces cannot occur spontaneously, only popular uprisings happen spontaneously. It needs a protagonist.

13. And I envisage this political instrument as an organisation capable of raising a national project that can unify and act as a compass for all those sectors that oppose neoliberalism. As a space that directs it-self toward the rest of society, that respects the autonomy of the social movements instead of manipulating them, and whose militants and leaders are true popular pedagogues, capable of stimulating the knowledge that exists within the people – derived from their cultural traditions, as well as acquired in their daily struggles for survival – through the fusion of this knowledge with the most all-encompassing knowledge that the political organisation can offer. An orientating and cohering instrument at the service of the social movements.

II. CONVINCe, DON'T IMPOSE

1. Popular movements and, more generally, the different social protagonists who today are engaged in the struggle against neoliberal globalisation both at the international and national levels reject, with good reason, attitudes that aim to impose hegemony or control on movements. They don't accept the steamroller policy that some political and social organisations tended to use that, taking advantage of their position of strength and monopolising political positions, attempt to manipulate the movement. They don't accept the authoritarian imposition of a leadership from above; they don't accept attempts made to lead movements by simply giving orders, no matter how correct they are.

2. Such [authoritarian] attitudes, instead of bringing forces together, have the opposite effect. On the one hand, it creates discontent in the other organisations; they feel manipulated and obligated to accept decisions in which they've had no participation; and on the other hand, it reduces the number of potential allies, given that an organisation that assumes such positions is incapable of representing the real interests of all sectors of the population and often provokes mistrust and scepticism among them.

3. But to fight against positions that seek to impose hegemony does not mean renouncing the fight to win hegemony, which is nothing else but attempting to win over, to persuade others of the correctness of our criteria and the validity of our proposals.

4. To win hegemony doesn't require having many people in the beginning, a few is enough. The hegemony reached by Movimiento 26 de Julio (July 26 Movement) led by Fidel Castro in Cuba, seems to us to be a sufficiently convincing example of this.

5. More important than creating a powerful party with a large number of militants is to raise a political project that reflects the population's most deeply felt aspirations, and thus win their minds and hearts. What is important is that its politics succeeds in procuring the support of the masses and consensus in the majority of society.

6. Some parties boast about the large numbers of militants they have, but, in fact, they only lead their members. The key is not whether the party is large or small; what matters is that the people feel they identify with its proposals.

7. Instead of imposing and manipulating, what is necessary is convincing and uniting all those who feel attracted to the project to be implemented. And you can only unite people if the others are respected, if you are willing to share responsibilities with other forces.

8. Today, important sectors of the left have come to understand that their hegemony will be greater when they succeed in bringing more people behind their proposals, even if they may not do so under their banner. We have to abandon the old-fashioned and mistaken practice of demanding intellectual property rights over organisations that dare to hoist their own banner.

9. If an important number of grassroots leaders are won over to these ideas, then it is assured that these ideas will more effectively reach the different popular movements. It is also important to win over distinguished national personalities to the project, because they are public opinion makers and will be effective instruments for promoting the proposals and winning over new supporters.

10. We believe that a good way to measure hegemony obtained by an organisation is to examine the number of natural leaders and personalities that have taken up its ideas and, in general, the number of people who identify with them.

11. The level of hegemony obtained by a political organisation cannot be measured by the number of political positions that have been won. What is fundamental is that those who occupy leading positions in diverse movements and organisations take up as their own and implement the proposals elaborated by the organisation, despite not belonging to it.

12. A test for any political organisation that declares itself not as not wanting to impose hegemony or control is being capable of proposing the best people for different positions, whether they are members of that very party, are independent, or are members of other parties. The credibility among the people of a project will depend a great deal on the figures that the left raises.

13. Of course this is easier said than done. Frequently, when an organisation is strong, it tends to underestimate the contribution that other organisations may have to offer and tend to impose its ideas. It is easier to do this than to take the risk of rising to the challenge to winning people over. While more political



positions are obtained, the more careful we have to be of not falling into the desire to impose hegemony or control.

14. Moreover, the concept of hegemony is a dynamic one, since hegemony is not established once and for all. To maintain it requires a process of permanently re-winning it. Life follows its course, new problems arise, and with them new challenges.

III. TO BE AT THE SERVICE OF POPULAR MOVEMENTS, NOT TO DISPLACE THEM

1. We have previously stated that politics is the art of constructing a social and political force capable of changing the balance of forces in order to make possible tomorrow that which today appears to be impossible. But, to be able to construct a social force it is necessary for political organisations to demonstrate a great respect for grassroots movements; to contribute to their autonomous development, leaving behind all attempts at manipulation. They must take as their starting point that they aren't the only ones with ideas and proposals and, on the contrary, grassroots movements have much to offer us, because through their daily struggles they have also learned things, discovered new paths, found solutions and invented methods which can be of great value.

2. Political organisations have to get rid of the idea that they are the only ones capable of generating creative, new, revolutionary and transformative ideas. And that therefore, their role is not only to advance demands that resonate with the social movements, but to also be willing to gather ideas and concepts from these movements to enrich its own conceptual arsenal.

3. Political and social leaders should leave behind the method of pre-established schemas. We have to struggle to eliminate all verticalism that stifles the initiative of the people. The role of a leader must be one of contributing with ideas and experiences in order to help grow and strengthen the movement, and not displace the masses.

4. Their role is to push the mass movement forward, or perhaps more than push, facilitate the conditions necessary so that the movement can unleash its capacity to confront those that exploit and oppress them. But helping to push forward is only possible if we fight shoulder to shoulder in local, regional, national and international struggles.

5. The relationship of political organisations with grassroots movements should therefore be a two way circuit: from the political organisation to the social movement and from the social movement to the political organisation. Unfortunately, the tendency continues to be that it only functions in the first direction.

6. It is important to learn to listen and to engage in dialogue with the people; it is necessary to listen carefully to the solutions proposed by the people themselves to defend their conquests or struggle for their demands and, with all the information collected, we must be capable of correctly diagnosing their mood and syn-

thesizing that which could unite them and generate political action, at the same time as we tackle pessimistic and defeatist ideas they may hold.

7. Wherever possible, we must involve the grassroots in the process of decision making, that is to say, we have to open up new spaces for people's participation, but people's participation is not something that can be decreed from above. Only by taking as our starting point the true motivations of the people, only if one helps them to discover the necessity of carrying out certain task for themselves, and only by winning over their hearts and minds, will they be willing to fully commit themselves to the actions proposed.

8. This is the only way to ensure that efforts made to help orient the movement are not felt as orders coming from outside the movement and to help create an organisational process capable of involving, if not all, then at least an important part of the people into the struggle and, little by little, win over the more backward and pessimistic sectors. When these latter sectors understand that, as Che Guevara said, the aims we are fighting for are not only necessary but possible, they too will choose to join the struggle.

9. When the people realise that their own ideas and initiatives are being put into practice, they see themselves as the protagonists of change and their capacity to struggle will enormously increase.

10. Taking all that has been said above into consideration, it becomes clear that the type of political cadres we need cannot be cadres with a military mentality. Today, it is not about leading an army, even if at some critical junctures this may and perhaps should be the case. Neither do we need demagogic populists, because it is not about leading a flock of sheep. Rather, political cadres should fundamentally be popular pedagogues, capable of fostering the ideas and initiative that emerge from within the grassroots movement.

11. Unfortunately, many of the current leaders have been educated in the school of leading the people by issuing orders, and that is not something that can be changed overnight. Thus, I do not want to create an impression of excessive optimism here. Achieving a correct relationship with the social movements is still a long way off.

IV. SHOULD WE REJECT BUREAUCRATIC CENTRALISM AND SIMPLY USE CONSENSUS?

1. For a long time, left-wing parties operated along authoritarian lines. The usual practice was that of bureaucratic centralism, influenced by the experiences of Soviet socialism. All decisions regarding criteria, tasks, initiatives, and the course of political action to take were restricted to the party elite, without the participation or debate of the membership, who were limited to following orders that they never got to discuss and in many cases did not understand. For most people, such practices are increasingly intolerable.

2. But in challenging bureaucratic centralisation, it is important to avoid falling into the excesses of ultra-democracy, which results in more time being used for discussion than action, since everything, even the most minor points, are the subject of rigorous debates that frequently impede any concrete action.

3. In criticising bureaucratic centralisation, the recent tendency has been to reject all forms of centralised leadership.

4. There is a lot of talk about organising groups at all levels of society, and that these groups must apply a strict internal democracy, ideas that we obviously share. What we don't agree with is the idea that no effort needs to be put in the direction of giving them a common organic link. In defending democracy, flexibility and the desire to fight on many different fronts, what is rejected is efforts to determine strategic priorities and attempt to unify actions.

5. For some, the one and only acceptable method is consensus. They argue that by utilising consensus they are aiming not to impose decisions but instead interpret the will of all. But the consensus method, which seeks the agreement of all and appears to be a more democratic method, can in practice be something profoundly anti-democratic, because it grants the power of veto to a minority, to such an extreme that a single person can block the implementation of an agreement that may be supported by an over-whelming majority.

6. Moreover, the complexity of problems, the size of the organisations and political timing that compels us to make quick decisions at specific junctures make it almost impossible to use the consensus method on many occasions, even if we leave aside the manipulating uses of the consensus method.

7. I believe that there cannot be political efficacy without a unified leadership that determines the course of action to follow at different moments in the struggle and to achieve this definition it is vital that a broad ranging discussion occurs, where everyone can raise their opinions and where, in the end, positions are adopted and everyone respects them.

8. For the sake of a unified course of action, lower levels of the organisation should respect the decisions made by the higher bodies, and those who have ended up in the minority should accept whatever course of action emerges triumphant, carrying out the task together with all the other members.

9. A political movement that seriously aspires to transform society cannot afford the luxury of allowing undisciplined members to disrupt its unity, without which it is impossible to succeed.

10. This combination of single centralised leadership and democratic debate at different levels of the organisation is called democratic centralism. It is a dialectical combination: in complicated political periods, of revolutionary fervor or war, there is no other alternative than to lean toward centralisation; in periods of calm, when the rhythm of events is slower, the democratic character should be emphasised.

11. Personally, I do not see how one can conceive of successful political action if unified action is not achieved, and for that reason I do not think that another method exists other than democratic centralism, if consensus has not been reached.

12. A correct combination of centralism and democracy motivates the leaders and, above all, the members. Only creative action at every level of the political or social organisation will ensure the triumph of our struggle. An insufficient democratic life impedes the unleashing of the creative initiative of all the militants, with its subsequent negative impact on their participation. In practice, this motivation manifests itself in the sense of responsibility, dedication to work, courage and aptitude for problem solving, as well as in the capacity to express opinions, to criticise defects and exercise control over the higher up bodies in the organisations.

13. Only a correct combination of centralism and democracy can ensure that agreements are efficient, because having engaged in the discussion and the decision-making process, one feels more committed to carry out the decisions.

14. When applying democratic centralism we must avoid attempts to use narrow majorities to try and crush the minority. The more mature social and political movements believe that it is pointless imposing a decision adopted by a narrow majority. They believe that if the large majority of militants are not convinced of the course of action to take, it is better to hold off until the militants are won over politically and become convinced themselves that such action is correct. This will help us avoid the disastrous internal divisions that have plagued movements and left parties, and avoid the possibility of making big mistakes.

V. MINORITIES CAN BE RIGHT

1. Democratic centralism implies not only the subordination of the minority to the majority, but also the respect of the majority toward the minority.

2. Minorities should not be crushed or marginalised; they should be respected. Nor should the minority be required to completely subordinate itself to the majority. The minority must carry out the tasks proposed by the majority at each concrete political junction, but they should not have to renounce their political, theoretical and ideological convictions. On the contrary, it is the minority's duty to continue fighting to defend their ideas until the others are convinced or they themselves become convinced of the other's ideas.

3. Why should the minority continue defending its positions and not submit to the position of the majority? Because the minority may be right; their analysis of reality might be more accurate if that they have been capable of discovering the true motivations of specific social forces. That is why those who hold minority positions at a determined moment should not only have the right, but the duty, to hold their positions and fight to convince the maximum amount of other militants of their positions through internal debate.

4. Moreover, if the majority is convinced that their propositions are correct, then they have nothing to fear in debating ideas. On the contrary, they should encourage it and try to convince the minority group. If the majority fears a confrontation of positions it is probably a sign of political weakness.

5. Is this not the case if we look at some of the left parties and social movements in Latin America? How many splits could have been avoided if the minority view had been respected? Instead, on many occasions, the entire weight of the bureaucratic apparatus has been used to crush them, leaving them with no choice but to split. Sometimes minorities are accused of being divisive for the simple reason that they want their ideas to be respected and be given space to debate them. Could it be that the true splitters are those who provoke the division by leaving the minority with no other option than to split if they hope to continue their struggle against positions they believe to be wrong?

6. The topic of majorities and minorities also has to do with the disjunction or non correspondence between representatives and the represented. This phenomenon may occur for different reasons, including: the organic incapacity of those who represent the real majority to achieve better representation in the mass organisations; the bureaucratic manoeuvres of a formal majority to keep itself in positions of power; the rapid change in political consciousness of those who elected these representatives due to developments in the revolutionary process itself. Those who only days before truly represented the majority may today simply represent a formal majority because the revolutionary situation has demonstrated to the masses that the position of the minority was correct.

7. The new culture of the left should also be reflected in a different approach toward the composition of leadership bodies in political organisations. For a long time it was believed that if a certain tendency or sector of the party won the internal elections by a majority, all leadership positions would be filled by cadres from that tendency. In a certain sense, the prevailing idea was that the more homogenous the leadership, the easier it would be to lead the organisation. Today different criteria tend to prevail: a leadership that better reflects the internal balance of forces seems to work better, as it helps to get all party members, and not only those of the majority current, feeling more involved in the implementation of tasks proposed by the leadership.

8. But a plural leadership, along the lines that we are proposing, can only be effective if the organisation has a truly democratic culture, because if that is not the case, then such an approach will produce a wave of unrest and render the organisation ungovernable.

9. Moreover, a real democratisation of the political organisation demands more effective participation by party members in the election of their leaders: they should be elected according to their ideological and political positions rather than personal issues. That is why it's important that the different positions are well known among the party membership via internal publications. It's also very important to ensure a more demo-

cratic formulation of candidatures and to safeguard the secret vote.

10. Finally, it is essential to remember that the internal democratic culture of a political organisation is the public face it offers to the social movements with which it wants to work. If it demonstrates, on the one hand, that its internal decision-making process occurs according to a democratic procedure based on tolerance and, on the other hand, that it carries out its work in a unitary manner, it can offer the social movements a model for successful action.

VI. THE NEED TO UNITE THE POLITICAL LEFT AND THE SOCIAL LEFT

1. The rejection by a majority of the people of the globalisation model imposed on our continent [South America] intensifies each day given its inability to solve the most pressing problems of our people. Neoliberal policies implemented by large transnational financial capital, which is backed by a large military and media power, and whose hegemonic headquarters can be found in the United States, have not only been unable to resolve these problems but, on the contrary, have dramatically increased misery and social exclusion, while concentrating wealth in increasingly fewer hands.

2. Among those who have suffered most as a result of the economic consequences of neoliberalism are the traditional sectors of the urban and rural working classes. But its disastrous effects have also affected many other social sectors, such as the poor and marginalised, impoverished middle-class sectors, the constellation of small and medium-sized businesses, the informal sector, medium and small-scale rural producers, the majority of professionals, the legions of unemployed, workers in cooperatives, pensioners, [and others]. Moreover, we should not only keep in mind those who are affected economically, but also all those who are discriminated and oppressed by the system: women, youth, children, the elderly, indigenous peoples, blacks, certain religious creeds, gays and lesbians, etc.

3. Neoliberalism impoverishes the great majority of the population of our countries, those impoverished in the socioeconomic sense and also in the subjective sense.

4. Some of these sectors have transformed themselves into powerful movements. Among those are women's, indigenous and consumer rights movements, and movements that fight for human rights and in defence of the environment.

5. These movements differ in many ways from the classical labour movement. Their platforms have a strong thematic accent and they reach across classes and generations. Their forms of organising are less hierarchical and rely more on networks than those of the past, while their concrete forms of actions vary quite a lot.

6. New social actors have also appeared. What is surprising, for example, is the capacity to mobilise that has manifested itself

among youth, fundamentally organised through electronic means, with the object of rejecting actually existing globalisation; resisting the application of neoliberal measures, promotion very powerful mobilisations against war and now against military occupation, and spreading experiences of revolutionary struggle, breaking up the information blockade that had been imposed on left and progressive ideas.

7. This growing rejection is being expressed through diverse and alternative practices of resistance and struggle.

8. The consolidation of left parties, fronts or political processes in opposition to neoliberalism is undeniable in various countries: Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay, El Salvador, Bolivia. In some, such as Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Mexico, powerful social movements have arisen, which have transformed themselves into major political actors, becoming important opposition forces that occupy the frontlines of the fight against neoliberal globalisation.

9. However, despite the depth of the crisis that this model has provoked, the breadth and variety of affected sectors that embrace the majority of the population, the multiplicity of demands that have emerged from society and which continue to remain unmet – all of which have produced a highly favourable situation for the creation of a very broad anti-neoliberal social bloc with enormous social force – the majority of these growing expressions of resistance and struggle are still far from truly representing a real threat to the system.

10. I believe that one of the reasons that helps explain this situation is that parallel to these objective conditions which are favourable for the construction of a broad alternative social bloc against neoliberalism, there are very complicated subjective conditions which have to do with a profound problem: the dispersion of the left.

11. And that is why I believe that for an effective struggle against neoliberalism, it is of strategic importance to articulate the different left sectors, understanding the left to mean all those forces that stand up against the capitalist system and its profit-driven logic, and who fight for an alternative society based on humanism and solidarity, built upon the interests of the working classes.

12. Therefore, the left cannot simply be reduced to the left that belongs to left parties or political organisations; it also includes social actors and movements. Very often these are more dynamic and combative than the former, but do not belong to or reject belonging to any political party or organisation. Among the former are those who prefer to accumulate forces by using institutions to aid transformation, while others opt for revolutionary guerrilla warfare; among the latter, some attempt to create autonomous social movements and different types of networks.

13. To simplify, I have decided to refer to the first group as the political left and the second group as the social left, even though I recognise that this conceptual separation is not always so in practice. In fact, the more developed social movements tend to acquire socio-political dimensions.

14. To sum up, I believe that only by uniting the militant efforts of the most diverse expressions of the left will we be able to fully carry out the task of building the broad anti-neoliberal social bloc that we need. The strategic task therefore is to articulate the party and social left so that, from this starting point, we can unite into a single colossal column the growing but still dispersed social opposition. **R**

Marta Harnecker is originally from Chile where she participated in the revolutionary process of 1970-1973. She has written extensively on the Cuban Revolution, and on the nature of socialist democracy. She now lives in Caracas and is a participant in the Venezuelan revolution. This translation was done by Federico Fuentes, for [Links: A Journal of Socialist Renewal](#).

**From out of our
PAST
Stuff they don't tell you!**

Howard Zinn
Peoples' historian
1922-2010

Historian, author, activist and teacher Howard Zinn has become a part of American popular culture. His monumental book, "A people's history of the United States" has sold 100,000 copies a year for 30 years. Zinn, a WWII bombardier, and a life-long civil rights and anti-war activist, believed American history has been animated by both imperialist ambition and injustice and the

people's resistance against it, from slavery and unjust wars to racial and gender inequality. He inspired Americans to view their history in a new way, not one of just presidents and generals but of everyday people.

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References to Zinn's writings have appeared in songs by Pearl Jam, Bruce Springsteen and a new documentary film produced by actor Matt Damon.

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The Formation of the NPA: A Page Has Been Turned

Daniel Bensaïd

We never saw the reference to Trotskyism as a way to shut ourselves off from others. For us, it was more like a polemical challenge. We accepted the Trotskyist tag in our conflict with the Stalinists – but without building a neurotic identity out of it or, conversely, downplaying the importance of this heritage. We always rejected the simplification that generally accompanies labelling of this sort. We were opposed to reductionist orthodoxies; while we always held Trotsky's contributions in the highest regard, our political education always sought to nurture the pluralist memory and culture of the working-class movement – by including Luxemburg, Gramsci, Mariategui and Blanqui, but also Labriola, Sorel and the entirety of what Ernst Bloch called the “warm stream of Marxism.” Of course, Trotskyism holds a special place within this heritage that lacks both heirs and an instruction manual. Thanks to the struggle of the Left Opposition and then of the Fourth International against the Stalinist reaction – which cost Trotsky, Nin, Pietro Tresso and many others their lives – the communist project

could not be entirely usurped by its bureaucratic impostor.

There are those who seek to put the history of the working-class movement behind us. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, has Trotskyism been deprived of its negative pole and therefore lost its very *raison d'être*? It is certainly true that present-day divisions within emancipatory movements cannot be conjugated in the past tense. Controversies that raged until quite recently – such as the one surrounding the precise character of the Soviet Union – are no longer of any practical consequence. In this sense, a page has indeed been turned. It would be reckless, however, to argue that Stalinism has been definitively relegated to the past. Stalinism was a particular historical form of the danger of state bureaucratization that threatens emancipatory movements. Contrary to the hasty claims of some, this danger is not the natural product of “the party form” but rather of the social division of labour in modern societies – and this is something infinitely more serious. This threat will loom large for all

forms of organization – whether trade-union, social-movement or party-political – as long as this social division of labour endures.

The specific historical form of Stalinism has died, but the lessons to be drawn from this experience are actually more relevant than ever. It is a matter of ensuring the development of socialist democracy at all levels. These lessons are no longer the exclusive property of organizations from the Trotskyist or council-communist libertarian tradition. They have a much wider base, and this is not something to complain about. When what I have called the “baggage of exodus”¹ becomes a collective asset of the new anti-capitalist Left, it is a kind of posthumous victory for those so badly defeated by the Stalinist counter-revolution. The “short twentieth century” has ended and a new cycle of class struggles is just beginning. Crucial new questions are being raised, beginning with the ecological challenge. It was essential for the LCR to break from routine and take the risk of reaching beyond itself without renouncing its history. The NPA will not define itself as a Trotskyist organization. It will aim to bring together a range of experiences and currents on the basis of the events and tasks of the new period. To go the distance, though, it will need history and memory. **R**

This article originally appeared in the February 5-11, 2009 issue of *Politis* and can be found on the ESSF website at www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article16143

Translation from French: Nathan Rao

Endnotes

1. See Daniel Bensaïd, *Strategies of Resistance & 'Who Are the Trotskyists?'* (London: IMG Publications, 2009).



What's Behind the Left Bloc's Success in Portugal?

Raphie de Santos

Portugal's left Bloc have achieved a major break through in the last five months. They polled nearly 11% and 10% respectively in the recent European and parliamentary legislative elections in June and September of this year. For a party that is firmly established outside of left social democracy this is a major achievement. How did it happen?

Their success is owed to a combination of objective and subjective factors. The objective factors are rooted in Portugal's twentieth century history while the subjective factors are linked to how the Left Bloc was formed and how they operate and engage with people in Portugal. The left in Britain and particularly in England can learn from the development and practice of the Left Bloc as they seek to make a major breakthrough.

PORTUGAL'S SITUATION

Portugal was ruled by a right wing military dictatorship for over 30 years. The primary resistance to it during this period was the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP). The dictatorship was overthrown in 1974 by a military coup organised by the young officers who had been conscripted to fight in imperialist wars in Africa. This coup evolved over a period of eighteen months into a revolutionary movement involving millions of people. They seized land and workers and peoples councils were set up all over Portugal. A situation of dual power developed between this new form of revolutionary democracy and a counter posed capitalist democracy. Only a failed left wing counter military coup finally drove the revolution in the direction of a capitalist democracy.

The PCP despite their role in facilitating the emergence of the new capitalist democracy remained popular and gained up to 20% of the popular vote in a series of elections in the years after the revolution. They also, controlled the major trade union confederation.

At the same time a number of Trotskyist and Maoist and other revolutionary groups emerged from the revolution as a diversity of ideas and solutions exploded during the eighteen month revolutionary period after the 1974 coup. However, they were fragmented and small and lived in the shadow of the large PCP.

The PCP was however very bureaucratic and set out to control all the social movements. They were also, Western Europe's most Stalinist communist party. For example they backed the coup against former Soviet leader Gorbachev.

In addition to these factors Portugal is and remains one of the poorest countries in Western Europe. It also, had/has the influence of a right wing Catholic Church which supported the dictatorship and has had a strong role in forming reactionary social

attitudes on women and homosexuality. Finally Portugal because of its colonial past has a multicultural population.

BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

The Revolutionary Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Revolucionário, PSR) the Portuguese section of the Fourth International had in an open and democratic way tried to build a party using the classical methods that we have seen attempted in Britain by several organisations.

The PSR's success was modest – never gaining more than 2% in elections despite them having a “correct programme” which was clearly presented to the Portuguese population and having the “right” line on most of the key issues which arose in Portugal. They turned to other currents on the left in an attempt to create a wider party that could attract the thousands of activists that were involved in the wider political and social campaigns.

THE ORIGINS OF LEFT BLOC

The Left Bloc was formed by three currents that had emerged from the revolution. These groups were : the People's Democratic Union (União Democrática Popular, UDP) a pro-Albanian Maoist group (Portugal has a large peasant population); the Revolutionary Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Revolucionário, PSR) the Portuguese section of the Fourth International ; and Politics XXI (Política XXI, PXXI) a group of ex-Communist party thinkers. The Left Bloc's real success was attracting initially hundreds and now thousands of independent activists from the political movements.

Discussions on the formation of the Left Bloc began in mid-1998. The PSR, UDP and Politics XXI took the first steps to reaching a basic political agreement and setting the basis for the new movement, without rushing into a fusion, without dissolving the existing organisations and without requiring unity in all areas of activity.

The presence from the beginning of independents who supported the project was a crucial aspect of the Bloc and gave it a much broader appeal than that of a simple electoral alliance of the three organisations.

At the same time a political and organisational agreement between the organisations committed them to make the Bloc a space for the convergence of positions and practices, not an area for political disputes, thereby enabling rapid progress in building the structures needed for the electoral and political campaigns that followed.

A key to the success of this coming together of the different left tendencies was a desire to build a movement/party that could play a key role in changing society. This meant putting aside all political and personal ambitions. It required a maturity driven by the desire to build a socialist society and accepting that no one party or individual had all the answers. It also, was a realisation that there are many paths to being an activist and militant and these are shaped by each individual's objective and subjective conditions.

The Left Bloc has become increasingly popular of the last ten years, especially among youth, with imaginative campaigns and dynamic proposals, the majority of its support comes from colleges, cities and educated youth or adults from the countryside, gathering both urban educated communities and dynamic labour unions, together with defenders of human rights and women's rights, the rights of immigrants and minorities (they are especially involved in supporting a strongly multicultural society), and also many ecologists. At this point the Bloc is by some seen as an alternative and refreshing "new" left political party to the older and more established Portuguese Communist Party and the centre left Socialist Party. It is a diverse entity formed by people with multiple backgrounds.

The Bloc proposed Portugal's first law on domestic violence, which was passed in parliament through the support of the Portuguese Communist Party and the Socialist Party, and other important laws on civil rights and guarantees, including the protection of citizens from racism, xenophobia and discrimination, gay marriage laws, laws for the protection of workers, legalisation of drugs and anti-bullfighting laws. They have also campaigned for free legal safe abortion laws, allowing women to decide what they want to do with their bodies.

Hundreds of trade union representatives, at a factory level and at national level, appealed for a vote for the Bloc in September 2009's elections. In Portugal they still have workers' commissions (a remnant of the 1974 revolution) that are directly elected in each workplace. In Portugal's biggest workplace, Ford-Volkswagen in Setubal, the Bloc's supporters are the majority.

As example of the Bloc's innovative campaigning style they created a board game and circulated among young people. If the dice fell on a social problem you had to move back, if it fell on one of the Left Bloc's proposals you could move forward and win. It was a big hit.

COLLECTIVE REVOLVING LEADERSHIP

The Left Bloc operates a policy of having a revolving collectivist leadership. This is to avoid a situation where the party depends on one or a few individuals. When the Bloc first had members of the Portuguese parliament it revolved the representatives every 5 months. The National committee of 80 people meets every two months. It is elected in proportion to the voting on the major resolutions at the annual conference.

Women must have minimum of 30-40 percent of all positions in the party. This goes right down to the election to the NC based on support for resolutions

LESSONS FOR BRITAIN

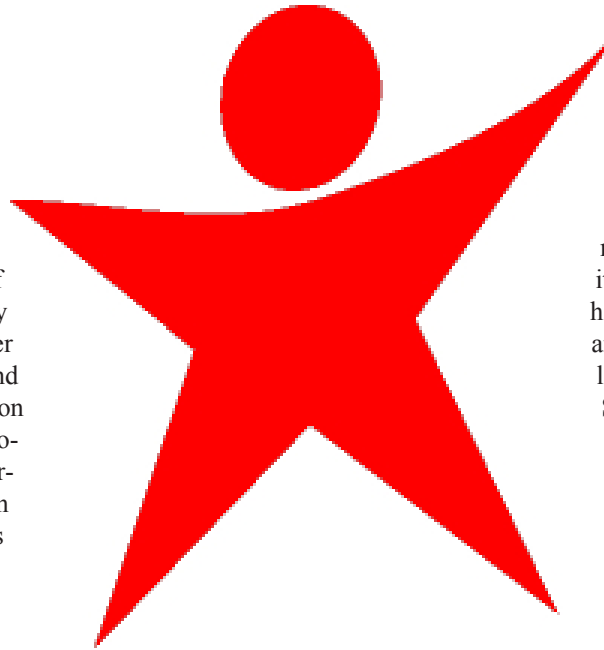
Britain has not in last 35 years lived under military dictatorship or had eighteen months of a revolutionary situation. But its labour movement and to a lesser extent its political movements have been dominated by one party – the Labour Party - like the

Communist Party has in Portugal. In both countries there has been disillusionment with this control. In Portugal it was the creation of unified, democratic and open force that has persuaded people to join it and vote for it. This has happened in Britain in Scotland with the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) in the period 1999 to 2003. Sadly the split in the party has fragmented the left in Scotland and confused its supporters and electoral base. But the SSP has learnt the lessons at the root of the split and is slowly rebuilding itself as a credible left alternative to the new Labour and the Scottish Nationalist Party.

The SSP shows the potential for attracting independent socialist and activists to a new socialist project if the project has open and democratic a structure and can campaign in a popular way without diluting its politics. That is the task facing socialists in England.

It is time as the left Bloc did in Portugal to put personal and particular party ambitions aside. The most severe capitalist crisis is since the 1930s depression offers socialists a unique opportunity to build anti-capitalist left parties outside of social democracy. History will not look kindly upon us if we fail not for want of trying but because of the petty self interest of individuals and political groups. **R**

Raphie de Santos a supporter of the Fourth International, whose mother escaped to Portugal in the 1930s from Franco's Spain only to seek refuge in Scotland during the 1950s from Salazar's dictatorship, takes a look at the evolution of Portugal's Left Bloc.



Britain: Building Left Unity Out of the Wreckage

The workers' movement in Britain has faced a crisis of working-class representation since the rise of New Labour in the mid-1990s and it has been becoming more acute ever since. This backdrop put left unity at the centre of the political agenda. The rise of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) and the Socialist Alliance (SA) were the first organisational expressions of this necessary process. A critical look at the last decade is essential if we are not to make the same mistakes – those who do not learn from history are pretty likely to make the same ones all over again.

Ten years the depressing reality is that the left, other than the Green Party, is weaker and left unity further away than at any time during that period. And there is little sign that this is about to change.

A comparison between the left's electoral challenges in 2001 and 2010 is as enlightening as it is depressing. In the 2001 general election voters in 98 constituencies in England had the opportunity to vote for an alternative to New Labour. On average the Socialist Alliance (SA) won only 1.6% of the vote but there were exceptions. Dave Nellist won 7.5% of the vote in Coventry North East, in St Helens South Neil Thompson won 6.9%, Cecilia Prosper won 4.6% in Hackney South and in the 2002 mayoral election in Hackney, Paul Foot won 12.7% of the vote beating both the Greens and Lib Dems.

The Socialist Alliance incorporated much of the far left including the Socialist Party (SP), the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Socialist Resistance's predecessor organisation, the International Socialist Group, as well as a small but significant number of former Labour Party members and independently minded socialists. They shared a common understanding that the rightward move of Labour was politically weakening the working class and that a political response was necessary to this. Contesting elections was one aspect of building this response. The smattering of reasonably good results was impressive for an organisation on its first electoral outing. They demonstrated that well-rooted candidates with the local left united behind their campaigns could attract working-class support. What was not shared by many of the participants was an understanding that creating a broad organisation with bases in working-class communities had to be a long-term project.

A watershed moment in the life of the Socialist Alliance was the decision of the Socialist Party to leave it at its December 2001 conference. The SP's reason for this was a SA conference decision to adopt a constitution based on one member one vote, arguing that it would take away "all rights from individual members

and minority organisations because the SWP are currently able to mobilise enough people to outvote all other forces in the SA." This pessimistic view was predicated on an assumption that the Socialist Alliance would not grow beyond its strength at that point and a judgement that the Socialist Party was destined to be in a permanent minority. More significantly – and this is a recurring phenomenon – it was taken for granted that on entering a broader formation any Marxist current had to guarantee that its members always voted the same way, even over the most trivial tactical details. The Socialist Party was not willing to put itself into what it saw as a subordinate position to the SWP inside the Socialist Alliance and so went on to establish the Campaign for A New Workers Party (CNWP). To use their phrase describing the SA after their departure, this is "little more than an electoral front for their organisation." It provides a focus for propaganda activity but is in no way distinguishable from a wholly owned Socialist Party campaign despite occasional engagements with it by some on the far left.

The second major watershed in the life of the Socialist Alliance was the mobilisation against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2001. Rather than use the enormous demonstrations and vast amount of grassroots activity to strengthen the SA, the SWP took them as opportunities to recruit to itself, even to the extent of calling the inaugural meeting of the Stop the War Coalition in its own name rather than use the Socialist Alliance as a potential unifier. As a consequence the larger, broader organisation had the smaller profile at antiwar events and a real opportunity was missed to connect the antiwar movement with the developing Socialist Alliance.

But the wars brought new people into politics. Whereas the SA had been comprised predominantly of experienced activists, the establishment of Respect brought them into contact with groups and individuals who disliked New Labour and violently opposed its wars. In east London, Birmingham and parts of the north-west the left had its first real chance to connect with local Muslim communities. The high-water mark of this approach was the election of George Galloway and a group of councillors in Tower Hamlets following election campaigns which combined both a vocal opposition to the imperialist wars and, just as importantly, resistance to the transfer of council housing stock.

For the first time in decades a left of Labour alternative had succeeded in overcoming the barriers imposed by the anti-democratic voting system and managed to win a modest number of elected representatives. What followed was an explicit refusal to learn either from the experience of similar parties in Europe or the Labour Party. Decision making was the prerogative of a small group while simultaneously trying to provide leadership to the Stop the War Coalition, Respect and the SWP. In the absence of its own political traditions and a cadre of independent leaders Respect as one priority among many was left to limp along subject to the political needs of a small group of its leaders.

It was this assessment of the organisation's weakness which prompted George Galloway to criticise the way in which it was being run. As he pointed out at the time of the European elections

it had little money in the bank and was failing to recruit. The debate around this issue resulted in the SWP leaving the Socialist Alliance to establish the short lived Left Alternative and Left List projects, which failed to gain much traction as projects for creating a political home for activists and voters.

The 2009 European elections saw the emergence of No2EU which had active support from the Socialist Party and a section of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union politically aligned to its leader Bob Crow. It described itself as “a coalition of trade unionists, political parties and campaigning groups which have come together to defend democracy here and across the European Union.” Despite that unpromising label its election program took a firm position in support of workers’ rights, opposition to the wars and neoliberalism. On that basis it was supported by Socialist Resistance. Its vote was predictably small given that it was an unknown coalition contesting an election for the first time but it was significant because it had the backing of a section of the most militant union in the country.

MOVEMENTS

At the time of writing it is not clear if a successor to No2EU will contest the general election. Some of its component parts, or the “core group,” have been discussing whether another left coalition can be put together to stand candidates. There is nothing to indicate that this will be done any differently from the way in which decisions about policy, organisation and tactics were done in No2EU when they were negotiated by a closed circle of invitees. Nevertheless as Socialist Resistance’s position is to support electoral challenges by credible socialist and ecosocialist candidates to New Labour we have sought to get involved in this project.

Socialist Resistance has tried to engage in a meaningful way with all the attempts to create an alternative to New Labour. Our strategic assessment is that the principal task for Marxists at the moment is to build a credible class-struggle party which can gain the support of millions of workers, youth and the oppressed. It is simply impossible for any existing left organisation to do this by itself.

There are a number of reasons for this, some of which are more important than others. The level of working-class militancy in Britain is at an historically low ebb. Predictions that the economic crisis would see a wave of strikes and occupations have been confounded by the fear and uncertainty which are the most common responses to job losses and pay cuts. All three major parties are contesting the election with slightly different austerity programs and not even Labour’s trade union base is complaining. Yet it is abstentionist to say that broader political alternatives are impossible without a rise in the level of the class struggle. George Galloway’s success; the election of Michael Lavellette; Gerry Hicks’ support in the Unite union all show that there is an audience receptive to radical socialist ideas and the existence of a broad party which expresses them is itself a modest factor in changing the political situation.

Long-term commitment to building an alternative is indispensable. In 1999, Portugal’s Left Bloc won 2.4% in the legisla-

tive elections, even with the advantage of proportional representation. In 2009 it won 16 MPs and the votes of 550,000 people. You can’t do this without patient construction work, building roots in unions and communities and winning a national profile as the voice of opposition to capitalism.

The internal life of the broad party is critical. The Left Bloc, the Red Green Alliance in Denmark, the French Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste and the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP) in Turkey have strongly pluralistic internal cultures. Freedom to dissent is an elementary right of any member or group of members. Without space to explore contrasting ideas a new organisation cannot develop its own political culture and is in the thrall of the dominant organised current. Neither the SP nor the SWP have drawn this lesson from these other European experiences.

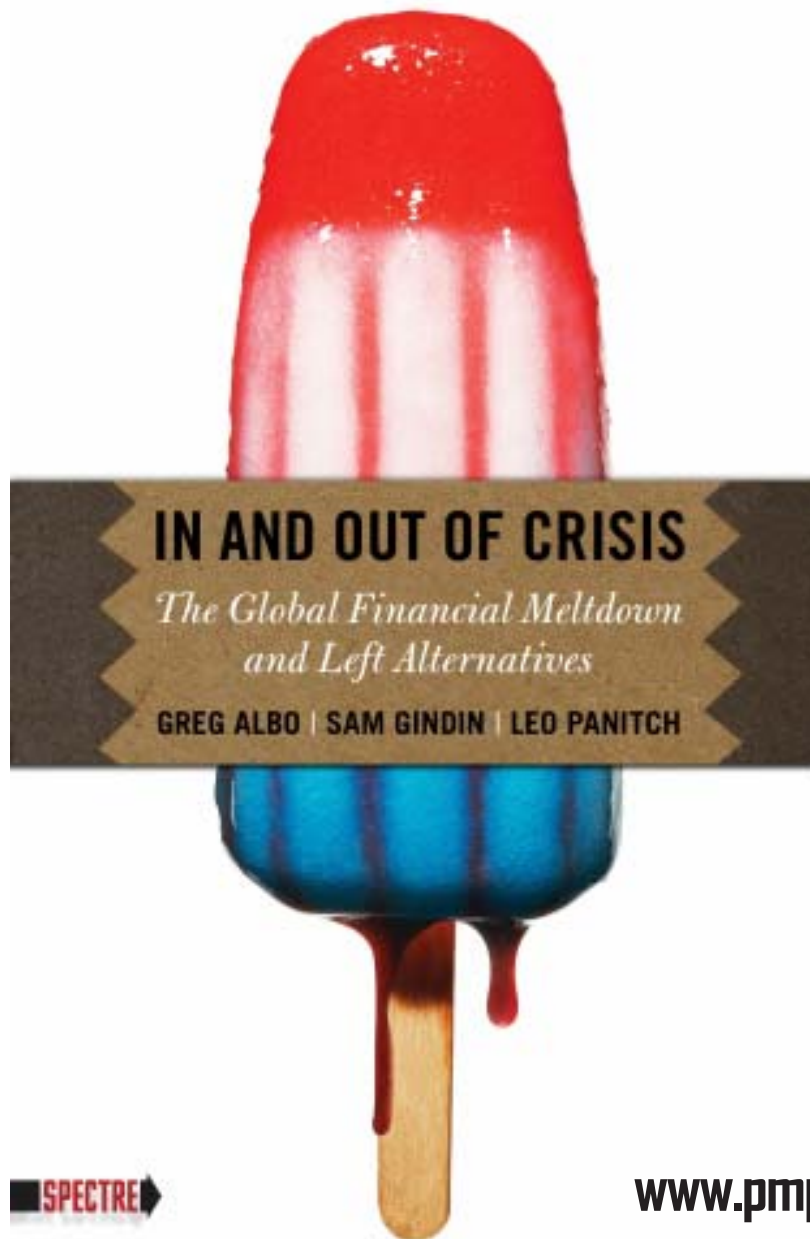
Respect suffered greatly from this problem. Using a practice borrowed from the internal life of the SWP, dissident voices were not simply argued against but had to be “hammered,” an ugly and unnecessary procedure since all the SWP members in the hall would be certain to vote the same way. Its most recent conference illustrated that this is a habit that some in Respect still find attractive despite all the evidence that it is simply the most effective way to assert bureaucratic control and actively alienates the critically minded militants the party should be trying to recruit.

Two major challenges face the British working class in the near future. The first is the austerity packages which the major parties are promising over the next five years. Wages, pensions, jobs and social services will all be targeted for deep cuts. Propaganda groups of a few hundred or a thousand activists are incapable of providing fighting leadership of the necessary breadth and depth at a national level. This requires attempting to crystallise the broad political vanguard at the highest level of political development possible.

Economic crises are inherently transitory. Climate change is going to seriously and adversely affect the way billions of the planet’s workers and poor live if the solutions proposed by its rulers at Copenhagen are allowed to stand. Yet developing a program of demands and action to meet the needs of the majority are at best an afterthought for most socialist organisations in Britain today. If we are looking for where the next major anti-capitalist radicalisation might come from one source is likely to be the tens of thousands of people who took to London’s streets in December 2009 demanding action.

As well as action they will need leadership and a political framework to harness their militancy. Creating the leadership and the organisation that will provide these is not without its risks but there are a number of positive and negative experiences we can draw on. **R**

Liam Mac Uaid is editor of *Socialist Resistance*. He also has his own blog at liammacuaid.wordpress.com



SPECTRE →

www.pmpress.org

Our world is in the grips of the most calamitous economic crisis since the Great Depression – and its epicenter is the imperial United States, where hallowed investment banks have disappeared overnight, giants of industry have gone bankrupt, and the financial order has been shaken to the core.

Contrary to those who believe U.S. hegemony is on the wane, Albo, Gindin and Panitch contend that the meltdown has, in fact, reinforced the centrality of the American state as the dominant force within global capitalism, while simultaneously increasing the difficulties entailed in managing its imperial role.

In conclusion, the authors argue that it's time to start thinking about genuinely transformative alternatives to capitalism – and how to build the collective capacity to get us there. We should be thinking bigger and preparing to go further. *In and Out of Crisis* stands to be the enduring critique of the crisis and an indispensable springboard for a renewed Left.