GOMERY AND THE LEFT

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Michael Albert's Theory

Ukraine's Orange Revolution

EDITORIAL

Liberal Party is not a lesser evil

Parliament has been transformed into a veritable circus as the Conservatives try to bring down the slimy Liberal minority government in the wake of the corruption exposed at the Gomery Commission.

Some radicals have reacted with almost total indifference. Others on the broad left have fallen back into a politics of "lesser evilism"—the idea that the Liberals should be supported in order to avoid a socially and fiscally conservative Tory government which is pro-war and desires a much closer working relationship with the US.

Clearly nothing fundamental will be resolved through a series of farcical parliamentary maneuvers. History is made through mass struggle and self-organization of the kind that we are currently seeing in Bolivia. However, at this moment social struggles are at a low ebb in Canada.

In Québec, the disgust at the rot in Ottawa and the Liberal party is palpable. A wave of justified anger is captured in a popular song refrain, "liberate us from the Liberals." Meanwhile Stephen Harper is busy trying to milk the scandal for all it's worth in order to advance the Conservative agenda. Outside of Québec he has the field largely to himself, as lesser evilism dominates on much of the left.

People are quite right to be concerned about the prospect of a Tory government in Ottawa. But the politics of lesser evilism, often fuelled by Canadian nationalism and despair about the current possibilities for changing the world, is nevertheless quite dangerous. It can lead people to forget about important past and present realities, and to dismiss the kind of steps necessary to build a renewed left on solid foundations.

For one thing, support for the Liberal minority government against the Tories, based in part on the fear of the latter selling out Canadian sovereignty, ignores the reactionary roots of the sovereignty of the Canadian state. These include Canada's very colonial past and its oppression of Aboriginal people and the Québécois.

It can also lead people to ignore the current evil deeds of the Liberal government and Canadian multinationals in promoting global capitalist plunder and participating in illegal interventions like those in Haiti and Afghanistan. It points attention away from the racist immigration and security policies of the Canadian state.

Furthermore, the Liberals—the leading governing party of Canadian capitalism since 1867—have been the most neoliberal federal government we've been subjected to, aggressively cutting social spending and corporate taxes. The Liberals have their own contingent of bigots who voted with the Tories against same-sex marriage legislation. The Liberals opposed same sex marriage until it was forced on them by court decisions. They refuse to order all Liberal MPs to vote in favour of the legislation.

Thus, declaring a truce with the Liberals means exaggerating the differences between them and the Tories and tolerating the disgusting politics they share with the Tories.

And what of the Liberal-NDP budget? Many who have suffered through lean years of cutbacks, poverty, social and environmental decay and crisis in services will be pleased that the NDP has been able to pressure the Liberals into finding $4 billion over several years (tucked away in surpluses) for increased program spending.

However, this increases total federal spending by only one percent and comes with the condition of no deficit. The pro-business character and misplaced priorities of the budget, such as large increases in military spending, remain, while the Liberals will simply use other legislation to give large corporations the tax cuts they incessantly demand.

In short, it's merely a watered down version of the neoliberal agenda (sometimes dubbed social liberalism). Nothing very different than what NDP provincial governments are doing in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and very much in line with the accommodate-with-capitalism-for-a-seat-at-the-table politics being posed by the labour officialdom.

Meanwhile, tactical support by the left for the Liberals does nothing to build the mobilization and deepen the political consciousness of working people that is needed if the left is ever to become strong enough to effectively resist what the Liberals or Tories do when they're in power. In fact, tactical support—putting our energies into propping up a business party like the Liberals—shrinks the space for any kind of politics independent of the Canadian ruling class. A better strategy for the left would be to, along with rebuilding our social movements, campaign against the diversion of anti-Liberal sentiment amongst working people to the Tories by attacking the Tory platform and the Liberal record.

The cold hard reality is that the in the cutthroat world of global capitalism no capitalist party—Liberal or Tory or NDP—will give us anything that we don't demand and independently organize for. No good can come from pinning an NDP tail on the Liberal dog. Indeed if the NDP fails to take a sharper oppositional stance, its brief moment in the sun may fade to oblivion.

Politics, of course, isn't simply about damning; it's also about creating alternatives.

For *New Socialist* the only genuine long-term alternative is a truly democratic socialism in which people directly manage their workplaces and communities themselves. But in the interim we need to construct independent working class-based organizations and alliances dedicated to fighting for reforms in the short term and to sweeping away the rot in Ottawa.

Given what exists at the moment this appears as a thankless task. Many on the radical left would like to ignore the problem altogether. But if we fail to make headway, we will be trapped in the same bad movie playing over and over and over. ★

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Box 167, 253 College St.
Toronto, ON M5T 1R5
(416) 955-1581
magazine@newsocialist.org
www.newsocialist.org

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Front cover images (clockwise, from top left corner): *Winnipeg General Strike (1919); student demonstration for Québec sovereignty in 1970; Bolivia 2005; Louis Riel's Provisional Government of 1869-70; Spanish Civil War (1936); Soviet Revolution of 1917 in Russia (centre image in star).*

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THE GOMERY INQUIRY AND THE LEFT

Turning our backs on Québec again?

BY DAVID MCNALLY

Like so often in the past, an opportunity to build meaningful solidarity between the left in English-speaking Canada and our sisters and brothers in Québec is today being squandered—this time in the midst of the fallout from the Gomery inquiry.

Outside of Québec, leftists have managed to become utterly mesmerized by events in the House of Commons, thereby missing the larger story. And that story, which is unfolding in Québec, has two main plots: a deepening crisis of federalism and a powerful resurgence of social movements.

What the Gomery inquiry represents for the majority of Quebecers is not simply a tale of dirty money and political corruption, though it is that too. More significantly, it is the latest reminder of just how shabby, dishonest and manipulative federalist politics are in Canada. Since the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, which gave birth to the modern nationalist movement in Québec, Canadian federalists have responded in two ways: first, with shady patronage politics designed to buy political support; and, secondly, when that's not managed to stop the movement for sovereignty, by bullying, threats and use of force (as during the October Crisis of 1970).

The Gomery inquiry has become a constant reminder to the people of Québec of the bankruptcy of federalist politicians—a reminder that, rather than accommodate aspirations for self-determination, the federalist elite prefers manipulative media blitzes, cheesy ad campaigns, political payoffs and dirty money. If these sleazy tactics are the best that federalism can offer, muse many Quebecers, then maybe the sovereigntists are right, maybe we would be better off on our own. This is the climate in which the Bloc Québécois looks set to sweep francophone Québec the moment a federal election is called.

It's in this context that we need to understand one of the greatest problems with the decision by Jack Layton and the NDP to prop up the Paul Martin government and support its budget (in return for a budget amendment that includes about $4 billion in additional social spending).

LAYTON BADMOUTHS SOVEREIGNTISTS

While it's understandable that many people are excited to see new money flowing to urgent areas such as social housing, the environment and student aid, it's deeply disturbing to see a party of the left support a budget that, among other things, increases military spending.

Worse, however, is that Layton and the NDP are now seen in Québec as just another party dedicated to propping up corrupt federalism. This image was reinforced when, at the time of the Liberal-NDP budget deal, Layton regularly lashed out at the Conservatives for "being in bed with separatists." Separatist-bashing has long been cheap politics in English-speaking Canada, drawing on a well of anti-French bigotry in order to garner support. Yet, in pandering to the backward politics of those who fail to respect Québec's rights as an oppressed nation, the NDP lowers the level of class and social consciousness, rather than raising it.

It needs to be added, of course, that there are other nations within the Canadian state —Aboriginal ones—whose rights must also be defended, sometimes against the Québec government as well as against Ottawa. But let's be clear that the Québec-bashers are no allies of Native rights. Moreover, the complex business of standing up for oppressed nations does not work by supporting some, opposing others. That only leads to a politics of divide and conquer. For those of us in the dominant culture, the bedrock of any progressive politics is support for the right to self-determination for all those historically oppressed by Canadian federalism. Anything less amounts to complicity in a

BACKGROUNDER

The Gomery Inquiry is a tale of dirty money and political corruption. Details first came to light over two years ago when Auditor-General of Canada Sheila Fraser found that Québec advertising and communications companies had been paid large sums for work which appeared never to have been done. The money involved, which the Chretien government had started spending in the year 2000, was allocated to a federal "sponsorship program," designed to raise the profile of the federal government in Québec. The feds hoped this would counter the sovereignty movement.

In fact, millions of dollars—perhaps over $100 million—was used fraudulently. The government's Public Works Department paid ad agencies to write reports or to run ad programs which, apparently, never materialized. In return, these companies were expected to kick back large sums to the federal Liberal Party in Québec. Testimony before Chief Justice Gomery, whose hearings began in 2004, suggests that tens of thousands of dollars were sometimes delivered in envelopes. In these ways, public funds were being funneled surreptitiously and illegally to the governing party of Canada.

As the scandal broke, PM Paul Martin appointed an inquiry under Judge Gomery whose report is expected late this fall. —D.M.

David McNally is the author of Another World Is Possible *and an editorial associate of* New Socialist.

federalism founded on oppression of Aboriginals and the people of Québec.

It's true that most Quebecers live in social and economic conditions dramatically better than do most Indigenous peoples, who constitute the most impoverished groups in our society. But since 1759, when they were conquered by the British empire, the population of Québec has been denied the democratic right to choose whether they wish to be governed through their own national state. This denial of their right to determine their own fate constitutes the grounds of Québec's national oppression.

QUÉBEC SOCIAL MOVEMENTS ON THE MARCH

It's especially disconcerting that wedges are being driven between Québec and the left in English-speaking Canada at the very moment when social movements are resurging in Québec. In response to an aggressive neoliberal program of privatization, social service cuts and attacks on unions launched by Québec's Liberal government under Jean Charest, popular struggles have broken out on multiple fronts.

Throughout the spring of this year, for instance, nearly 200,000 university and college (CEGEP) students waged a militant strike against the Charest government's cuts to student loans and bursaries. Mass actions, including road blockades and occupations figured prominently. High school students also mobilized in their thousands to demonstrate support.

No sooner had the student strikes ended than May saw a further series of significant protests. Public employees launched May Day strikes to pressure for contract improvements. Five days later, 35,000 teachers took to the streets of Québec City on similar grounds. Then, on May 8, the Women's Global Charter for Humanity arrived in Québec to a celebratory greeting from 15,000 feminists and social activists.

Nowhere else in the Canadian state is the struggle against neoliberalism so sustained as it is in Québec at the moment. It is difficult to imagine another region which could carry off weeks of mass student struggles, or in which the women's movement could turn out 15,000 supporters. It should also be noted that demonstrations against Bush's war in Iraq were considerably larger in Québec than in any other part of the Canadian state.

The federalist crisis accelerated by the Gomery inquiry thus comes at a time of rising social struggle. This would be the ideal moment for a solidarity campaign by labour and the left in English-speaking Canada which denounced corrupt federalism, affirmed Québec's right to self-determination and declared support for the progressive social struggles by students, feminists and unions in Québec.

The response by the NDP, which was promoted by major labour leaders like Ken Georgetti of the Canadian Labour Congress and Buzz Hargrove of the Canadian Auto Workers, moves in exactly the opposite direction. Rather than building class solidarity across national lines, NDP-labour support for the Martin government has exacerbated national divisions by aligning the mainstream left with federalism.

"Nowhere else in the Canadian state is the struggle against neoliberalism so sustained as it is in Québec at the moment."

RADICAL LEFT STRATEGY

A radical left strategy would have involved a campaign throughout English-speaking Canada to work with unions, women's groups and student organizations to denounce the federal Liberals and their Québec cousins. A campaign which affirmed Quebecers' right to self-determination and denounced shabby federalism would have created the space for advancing class-based criticisms of the pro-business agenda of the Bloc Québécois, the Action Democratique du Québec and the Parti Québécois. It could also have built links with those progressive forces in Québec who have been working to build independent socialist politics.

Instead, the mainstream left aligned itself with the central state in Ottawa and, in so doing, against progressive forces on the ground in Québec. Layton's crude attacks on "separatists" only reinforced these divisions.

It's important to understand, however, that the roots of these errors run much deeper than just bad tactics. Throughout its history, the NDP and labour leaders in English-speaking Canada have campaigned for a strong federal state. This has to do with the social democratic fixation on the state as the agent of social progress. This fixation is dangerous in a number of ways.

First, it aligns social democrats with the very state that has expropriated the land and political rights of oppressed peoples, most notably First Nations and Québec. Secondly, it identifies the left with the bureaucratic central state that ordinary working people find so remote and alienating. Thirdly, it ignores the fact that, rather than a progressive institution, this very central state has been the principal instrument for implementing neoliberal policies of privatization and social service cuts.

Finally, and most crucially, the statism of the NDP and labour brass misidentifies the source and the agency of progressive change. Real social progress comes not from above, as manna delivered to the masses from on high. It comes from below, through the self-mobilization of masses of people, remaking themselves and forging new solidarities, and imposing their demands on governments in the process (until the time comes when they are ready to displace these governments).

Yet, instead of aligning themselves with social movements in Québec that seek to mobilize from below, the mainstream left in English-speaking Canada has once again lined up with the central state and the

See GOMERY INQUIRY: Page 9

QUÉBEC STUDENT STRIKE

A battle won… the struggle continues

BY JOSÉ BAZIN

(TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH BY INGRID VAN DER KLOET)

The seven week Québec student strike launched on February 24 ended with the government backing down on certain issues and a radicalization of many Québécois youth. It is time for the Québec student movement to take stock.

Since coming to power on April 2003, Québec's Charest government sought to lower income tax to levels comparable to those found in the US and English-speaking Canada. Though the tax cuts delighted the Québec Employer's Council, it required cuts to social services, including education. To accomplish this, the government imposed reforms to Aide Financière aux Études (AFE), Québec's student financial assistance and loan program, which included a reduction of 103 million dollars to the student bursary programme each year, as well as policies to link student loan forgiveness to academic achievement. The reforms included provisions to establish income-contingent loan repayments and a long-term project to eliminate student bursaries altogether. Furthermore, the reforms opened the way to decentralize and privatize the CEGEP system.

In the fall of 2004, three student federations met to prepare a strategy of response: ASSÉ, the militant wing of the student movement, and the moderate student federations FEUQ and FECQ. Soon, however, divisions began to emerge: the FEUQ and the FECQ mobilized on a platform of fighting cuts to the AFE, while ASSÉ developed a broader strategy and political project.

By January, independent student organizations united with ASSÉ to form CASSÉÉ, a new, stronger and more radical coalition. This was an important step on the road leading to the strike. Though this new coalition was originally formed as a temporary measure to democratically coordinate the strike, it ended up deepening the politics of the movement by mobilizing around the following three-point platform:

- An end to all the reforms of AFE, not only the 103 million cut to bursaries
- An end to the entire project of privatizing and decentralizing the CEGEP system
- That all demands are to made with the intent to move towards free tuition and an eradication of student debt.

This platform launched a debate about the place and function of education in Québécois society.

ASSÉ: Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiate ("the association for student union solidarity"), a militant student federation.

CASSÉÉ: Coalition de l'ASSÉ Élargie, a coalition including ASSÉ affiliates and other student unions, representing the radical wing of the student movement.

CEGEP: Québécois college network attended by young people, generally aged 17 to 20, who have finished secondary school and who are either taking a course in technical education or preparing to go to university.

FEUQ: Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec, a moderate student federation based in the universities with strong links to the Parti Québécois.

FECQ: Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec, a moderate student federation based in the CEGEPs with strong links to the Parti Québécois.

THE EIGHTH STUDENT STRIKE

With deepening divisions in the movement, it became clear that the prospects were slim for a national regroupment of the FEUQ, the FECQ, CASSÉÉ and the independent associations to co-ordinate a strike. By the end of January, the various student groups were no longer speaking to each other.

It is at this point that CASSÉÉ, despite being a much smaller coalition, decided to push for its demands and plan for a strike without consulting the FECQ and FEUQ. During the second and third weeks of February 2005, members of CASSÉÉ held general strike assemblies, which resulted in the launching of a general student strike on February 24.

However, by the beginning of March, FECQ fell into step by declaring a strike too. And on March 8, after realizing that the government was not going to alter its plans, the FEUQ declared a strike for the first time in its history. Thus, despite the divisions within the student movement, the strike managed to grow.

The strike turned out to be the longest and biggest in Québec history. This is no small accomplishment given the fact that Québec had 7 student strikes since 1968—most of them successful ones. Though the 1988 strike was a only a partial victory for the student movement, succeeding in stopping some reforms to AFE, and though the 1990 strike ended in a serious defeat as the government succeeded in increasing tuition fees by 140 percent, the strikes of 1968, 1974, 1978, 1986 and 1996 led to real victories, including the creation of a public university system, improvements to the student loan and grant system and a tuition freeze. The fact that the recent strike—the 8th one since 1968—was the longest and biggest is truly significant.

THE RED SQUARE

Beginning at the end of February, CASSÉÉ initiated a creative and successful communication strategy: it began using the symbol of a "red square" as a shorthand for the idea that students were "squarely in the red." The red square became a popular symbol expressing support for the students' demands and of opposition to the policies of the Liberal government. Indeed, the spring of 2005 will go down in Québec history as the spring of the red square. The symbol was worn by hundreds of thousand

José Bazin is a student at the University of Québec in Montréal and is a member of the coordinating committee of Gauche socialiste (Québec section of the Fourth International, one of the political entities within the Union des forces progressistes—UFP). The original article appeared in the Fourth International's French journal INPRECOR (http://www.inprecor.org).

of people. Whether made of cloth, paper or paint, it spread like wildfire throughout Québec and became a symbol of the growing discontent with Charest's government and its neoliberal policies. CASSÉÉ used the symbol to great effect to show how the student movement had won important sympathy from the general population. FECQ and FEUQ also adopted the symbol, which increased the sense of unity in the movement. From now on, demonstrations against Charest's government will take place under the sign of the red square, regardless of which union people belong to. The symbol succeed in creating unity, even though the different federations continued to have fundamental disagreements.

But the prior divisiveness came back to haunt the movement. Originally, when communication between CASSÉÉ and FEUQ and FECQ had broken down, the two moderate federations decided at the beginning of the strike to negotiate with the government without CASSÉÉ. Jean-Marc Fournier, the new Minister of Education, took advantage of this division and keep CASSÉÉ away from the negotiating table, calling it too radical and "violent." By negotiating only with the more moderate segments of the student movement, Fournier managed to secure conditions for making only minor concessions to the student movement. Or so it seemed.

FOURNIER REJECTED

Fournier made his first offer—a restoration of $41 million of the $103 million—by playing on the moderation of the FECQ and FEUQ. This offer was considered ridiculous by the FECQ and FEUQ, as well as by CASSÉÉ. The arrogance of the Liberal government spurred the movement, and the following day 250,000 students went on strike. A demonstration of 100,000 people in Montréal denounced Fournier's proposal. The discontent was so strong that it was not only the most militant student organizations that took to the streets. The School of Management at UQAM went on strike for a week, and one-day strikes took place at the National School of Public Administration, the Polytechnique and McGill University.

When Fournier made his second offer on April 1, the student associations who initiated the strike had already been out for five weeks. This time, the government backed down on numerous points. Although it would not cancel all changes it was planning to the AFE, the government abandoned income contingent loan repayment, the linking of debt forgiveness to academic performance, and its long-term plan to abolish student grants. In addition, the student grant programme would get its 103 million dollars back for the 2006-2007 year onwards. The Québécois government said it would look to the federal government for this money.

A STRUGGLE THAT MUST CONTINUE

Support for Fournier's offer was not unanimous. FEUQ and FECQ agreed to accept the offer and end the strike, whereas CASSÉÉ agreed to end the strike but did not accept the offer. Fournier's offer was problematic on numerous levels. Students lost $103 million for the school year of 2004-2005, as well as $33 million for the following year. This means students fought for a future cohort that will study between 2006 and 2010, the period during which the $103 million will be restored to the bursary programme. The agreement did not address the clause in the AFE reforms which stipulates that the balance of money allocated to loans and bursaries can be renegotiated each year to account for inflation. Finally, although money from the federal government is welcome, it allows the Québec government to maintain its tax cuts and neoliberal policies.

PHOTO: HTTP://ASE.ATH.CX/BADACID/

Public school students march in Montréal on March 31st.

PHOTO: HTTP://ASE.ATH.CX/BADACID/

Student demonstration in Québec City on March 24, 2005.

The student movement forced the government to retreat from its position, and it must now build links with other dynamic social forces in order to continue the struggle against neoliberalism. The FEUQ has faced sharp criticism from its rank and file, and several student associations have called assemblies to disaffiliate from the FEUQ. The FEUQ rode the tail-end of the strike, joining only when it was forced to and focusing only on narrow economic issues instead of furthering political debate. Following the strike, the student movement can only be built outside of the FEUQ so that the movement can further political debate on the education system and the fight against neoliberalism. CASSÉÉ will need to be more open to student associations which radicalized during the strike, and not fall back on the inner-core of ASSÉ that existed in early 2005. CASSÉÉ has a political platform and set of demands that will enable the student left to face the future with hope. Will it also have the will to develop a long-term strategy so that this platform can be implemented? This is the question the student left must ask itself. ASSÉ will need to structure itself in order to become a broad and democratic student organization which is firmly anchored to the left.★

FRIENDS OF GRASSY NARROWS

Becoming allies: working in solidarity with the Anishinaabe

BY DAVE BROPHY

This is the last part of a three-part series of articles about Indigenous struggle in what is now known as Northwestern Ontario. The first article, in the Feb/March/April 2005 issue of *NS*, provided some history of the relationship between the Anishinaabe and the Canadian state during the years leading up to and following the signing of Treaty 3 in 1873, including the Canadian state's violations of the agreement and the state-led campaign to destroy the Anishinaabe's indigenous economy. The second article, in the May/June 2005 issue of NS, examined how the Canadian state continues to undermine the livelihoods of the Anishinaabe and the political factors that are shaping Grassy Narrows' present fight for their lands.

This article will look at the Friends of Grassy Narrows, a group which works in solidarity with the Anishinaabe.

I first visited the road blockade at Slant Lake, near the reserve of Grassy Narrows First Nation, shortly after it went up. Activists from Grassy Narrows, which is called Asubpeeshoseewagong by the Anishinaabe, had started denying logging trucks entrance to the Whiskey Jack forest, located on the community's traditional territory, on December 3, 2002. I was with Peter Kulchyski, head of the Native studies department at the University of Manitoba, and Alon Weinberg, a long-time environmental activist. We drove out from Winnipeg to offer moral and, we hoped, future material support to the courageous stand that was being taken by this small but determined community.

After spending an evening and the early part of the next day with the blockaders, (most of whom were from Grassy Narrows, although supporters from other First Nations were also there) we were truly inspired by the warmth, dignity and solidarity demonstrated among them. Clearly, there was much to be learned here from a group of people, made up of women and men, youth and elders, working together with few resources to stop a huge, state-sanctioned corporation from plundering their homeland.

Friends of Grassy Narrows formed shortly thereafter. The group never formulated an anti-racist politic explicitly, so I cannot specify a unanimously-held position for all members of the collective. I would nevertheless say that the implicit intent of our work has been to expose and condemn the systemic racism faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada, especially in terms of being deprived of control over, and even access to, their own lands. Most of this work so far has been focused around building a political relationship with the Anishinaabe at Grassy Narrows, although we have tried to also lend support to other related struggles as much as possible.

The group's implicit anti-racist politic has been implemented primarily through popular education and public protests. While we have learned a lot in the process, a major challenge remains in trying to reach people beyond the far left. But the most interesting challenge for those interested in anti-racist organising has occurred in the course of building a political relationship with Asubpeeshosee-wagong activists.

As allies, our approach has been to be responsive. Though we have not always shied away from discussing politics with people at Grassy Narrows and Indigenous activists in Winnipeg, we have most often tried to 'follow the lead.'

From my perspective, this was an appropriate attitude at the beginning. I didn't feel I had any insight to offer activists at Grassy Narrows when I first got involved. For a long time I just took a lot in, through listening and reading, hoping to better understand the situation. No doubt this process continues, and will remain incomplete. Nevertheless, I have gained some relevant knowledge over the last two or more years concerning the oppression of indigenous peoples in this country.

After a certain point, I think, limiting oneself to strictly listening can take on a colonial, parasitic dynamic. There comes a time when the exchange should be more balanced. And it is indeed a balancing act, since Euro-Canadians have done virtually all of the talking, historically, when interacting with the Indigenous peoples. Bearing this in mind, we have to be

The implicit intent of our work has been to expose and condemn the systemic racism faced by indigenous peoples in Canada, especially in terms of being deprived of control over their own lands.

Dave Brophy is a member of the Friends of Grassy Narrows Winnipeg.

conscious about affording space to Indigenous peoples if we are to learn from them and earn their respect.

But if there continues to be little dialogue of substance even once some trust has been established and some insights potentially gained on our part as allies, 'following the lead' becomes an unnecessary form of hand-holding. I think members of our group, myself included, have at times been overly reluctant to truly engage with the Indigenous activists who we've gotten to know. Too much reluctance in this respect reduces our effectiveness as allies. We need to be willing to share our ideas about strategy and tactics, rather than avoiding them simply out of our own shame or fear.

I think members of our group, myself included, have at times been overly reluctant to truly engage with the indigenous activists who we've gotten to know.

Nevertheless, while it is important not to succumb to the shame or fear that may come up while attempting to act as an effective anti-racist ally, such feelings may reflect a real need to better articulate what 'common ground' can potentially be shared by Natives and settlers. I am sure that my own anti-racist work, at least, would benefit from a more developed expression of this, going beyond simple appeals to "protect the Earth," or to "resist corporate and state domination," and identifying how the realisation of such objectives in practice is actually in the interests of Natives and settlers alike.

Clearly, part of the challenge in this comes from the fact that Natives and settlers are extremely isolated from one another both historically and in the present day. Our isolation in day-to-day living sustains and adds to the sense of 'otherness' that has been created over generations of apartheid, adversely affecting many Native-settler interactions.

Therefore, long-term relationships where trust, respect and even friendship can be built are crucial. Once those kinds of relationships are established, a gradual development of understanding, in terms of identifying concretely how oppressed and oppressor both lose under white supremacy, becomes more likely.

One of the reasons that I believe this is because, personally, I have come to better understand the oppression that I suffer and reproduce as a man under patriarchy, primarily through the long-term relationship that I have shared with my partner, who is a woman. Conversely, I suspect that I have yet to come to a more fully emancipatory understanding of anti-racism, because I have so far not had that kind of sustained dialogue in an inter-racial context.

To build those kinds of relationships may not be easy, but it should be simple, in the sense that all it really takes is a commitment to consciously challenging the racial segregation that exists in both our personal and political lives.

Similarly, reaching a broader spectrum of people even within white-dominated domains, should be straightforward, if unfamiliar. Community associations, high school, university and college classes, labour councils, union locals and churches will all most likely host presentations and discussions with us if we ask.

Anti-racist allies of Indigenous peoples should also strive to cooperate, if possible, with groups like No One Is Illegal (NOII) and other immigrant and refuge rights campaigns that have formed in response to the struggles of immigrants and refugees against the systemic racism they face. Many such groups have expressed a desire to link immigrants' and refugees' struggles with those of Indigenous peoples. Identifying and responding politically to the parallels between 'third world' and 'fourth world' neo-colonialism should come more easily as we work towards bettering both the expression and practice of our anti-racist politics, whether our focus is on the struggles of Indigenous peoples or those of immigrants and refugees. ★

Gomery Inquiry

Continued from Page 5

historic party of big business, the Liberals.

And it does so because it identifies the central issue of the moment as a struggle between centralizers and decentralizers, rather than one between workers on the one side and big business and its governments, both provincial and federal, on the other.

Take, for instance, an influential article by former NDP policy adviser James Laxer, published in the *Globe and Mail* in late April. Laxer argues that we are undergoing a "national crisis" in which the two parties of the "Canadian system," the Liberals and New Democrats, risk being overrun by "the parties of radical decentralization," the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois. The task of progressives, he urges, is to support the first group against the second. This means, he suggests, rallying around the Liberals as "the great party of the Canadian centre."

While others on the mainstream left might be a bit more cautious in their description of the Liberals, it's clear that most share Laxer's desire to "sustain the Canadian system."

And this has been the Achilles' heel of the institutional left in English Canada for the last half century. Whenever the opportunity presents itself to build real solidarity with progressive forces in Québec—which includes supporting their demands for the right to determine their own future—the "respectable" left flinches, choosing support for the central state in Ottawa over real solidarity with their sisters and brothers in Québec's popular movements.

The irony is that it's Canadian capital, and its historic federal party, the Liberals, that benefits from this choice. By siding with the central state, the social democratic left reinforces divisions between labour and the left along national lines. As a result socialism and working class unity get set back each time.

That's why, if progress for the left is to be produced from the Liberal crisis associated with the Gomery inquiry, it will have to come from the forces of the independent radical left. And this will require a clear break from the "Canadian system" and its devotion to a strong state in Ottawa. It will mean, instead, standing up for the rights of oppressed peoples to self-determination while mobilizing for real change from below. ★

Open border policy for tsunami victims promised ... but not delivered

BY JACKIE ESMONDE

On December 26, 2004, massive waves resulting from an earthquake deep beneath the ocean swept across South Asia and the east coast of Africa, leaving a path of destruction that stunned the world. It is estimated that over 160,000 people were killed. Millions have been displaced.

In the immediate aftermath there was an unprecedented response from people around the world. The response from everyday people put their governments to shame, as the initial responses of most governments were far more muted. Promises of money increased significantly in response to public outcry.

The Canadian government also stepped forward as the first, and only, developed country to offer to open its borders to ensure that tsunami victims could escape to safety. Given the slow pace at which aid was making its way to the affected areas, opening the borders had the capacity to address an immediate need. Such compassion was staggering when we consider the anti-immigrant tenor of government policy, particularly since September 11.

However, as time has passed, it has become clear that the Canadian government's promises to help evacuate people from the affected areas were little more than a cynical public relations exercise.

CANADA'S PROMISE

On January 3, 2005, the federal government issued a press release stating that it was "committed to doing as much as we can to help reunite close family members of Canadian citizens and permanent residents who have been, and continue to be, seriously and personally affected by the disaster."

There are a number of ways to immigrate to Canada. The main ones are to come as a refugee, as a "skilled worker," or by way of sponsorship by a family member (or member of the "Family Class"). Citizenship & Immigration Canada (CIC) promised to expedite all existing applications of Family Class applicants for those who had been and continued to be seriously and personally affected by the disaster and who have immediate family members in Canada. The government also promised to expedite new Family Class applications for those who were directly affected by the tsunami.

Worried family members in Canada were hopeful that they could bring their relatives to Canada quickly. However, the press release deliberately glossed over one key problem: the problematic definition of "family" in the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*.

The Act allows Canadian citizens and permanent residents to sponsor spouses, common-law and conjugal partners, children, parents and grandparents. That's it. Other close family members, such as siblings, aunts and uncles, are not included. Once this limitation became evident, there was an immediate outcry from people with family members in the affected areas, and demands to expand the definition of "family class" to include extended family.

The limits on the help being offered were made very clear to me when I spoke with a friend from Sri Lanka. Almost all of her husband's family had been swept away in the tsunami, including her sister-in-law with her young child in her arms. The family home had been destroyed. The only living family members were her husband's elderly father and uncle. The father could be sponsored, but not her husband's uncle.

Jackie Esmonde is an immigration lawyer and member of the New Socialist Group.

The family was desperate to bring them both to Toronto. To date, they have not been successful.

In response to stories such as these, the Canadian government promised to consider other close family members for sponsorship on a "case-by-case" basis. CIC instructed extended family members to apply as "Skilled Workers" with letters from family members in Canada explaining how they would provide economic support.

Normally Skilled Worker applications are only granted to people with a university education, strong English or French language skills and a solid work history in skilled employment. Only a small group of people can immigrate this way.

In the case of tsunami-affected applicants, Immigration Officers were instructed that they had the discretion to grant skilled worker applications for unqualified applicants with family in Canada. However, in practice many such applications have been turned down because the applicants have failed to convince the Immigration Officer that they would be able to "contribute financially" to Canada. Clearly the Canadian government's assurance that it would do whatever was necessary to bring family members to Canada quickly was nothing more than an empty promise.

The reality is that while CIC has sped up processing of some family class applications that were underway before the tsunami hit, there is little evidence that they have sped up any new applications. In fact, visa offices in places like Colombo, Sri Lanka are not even accepting new applications.

BARRIERS TO IMMIGRATION

Other obstacles stand in the way of those lucky enough to have their applications considered. The quantity of red tape that must be overcome before being allowed to immigrate to Canada makes it impossible to bring people from disaster-affected areas quickly. Some key steps in obtaining permission to immigrate to Canada include completing a medical examination (most disabled people are not allowed to immigrate to Canada), obtaining a security clearance and proving identity. The Canadian government has not removed any of these steps to assist people in tsunami-affected areas, even where it is impossible to complete them quickly.

For example, it is impossible to prove your identity when all documents were lost to the waves. Replacing lost documents is extremely difficult in a country where state infrastructure has yet to be replaced. Without valid identity documents, it is not possible to obtain a security clearance from the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS). So those attempting to take advantage of Canada's supposed largess face insurmountable obstacles and delays.

Does anyone doubt that the response to the tsunami would have been quite different had the waves hit England and not South Asia?

It is impossible to complete medicals in areas in which hospitals and medical staff, or the roads to reach them, have been washed away. At the best of times, requiring people to pass medicals before they can immigrate to Canada discriminates against people with disabilities. In cases involving flight from a disaster zone, how can such requirements possibly be justified?

It is likely that by the time many applicants have jumped all of the hurdles for immigration to Canada, they will either have died as a result of the humanitarian crisis, or the crisis will have ended.

A HUMANITARIAN POLICY FOR PEOPLE FLEEING DISASTER ZONES

Although I would like to see the opening of borders to all migrants, in the interim it may be possible to convince governments of the need to open borders for those fleeing from humanitarian disasters. A commitment to getting people out of disaster-affected areas requires cutting some of the red tape. The best way to do this would be to put in place specific legal provisions that cut the red tape for all people seeking to flee areas devastated by natural disasters or wars.

There are several ways this could be done. One would be to create a new "class" of applications for people seeking to flee natural disasters or civil war. Applicants must be free to flee from such areas and come to Canada immediately. The processing of their applications could be done while they wait in Canada. Medical requirements must be waived. In effect, this is what is already done for refugees.

Natural disasters and civil wars will continue to occur, likely with greater frequency. Canada, after all, contributes to the creation of such conditions through policies that encourage environmental degradation and conflict. Without any principled policy in place, the Canadian government is free to pick and choose when it will provide assistance and open the doors to the victims of humanitarian disasters. For example, during the bombing of Kosovo in 1999, the Canadian government brought plane-loads of Kosovar refugees to Canada. This was motivated by a desire to highlight the victimization of Albanians in Kosovo, and justify the NATO bombing campaign.

All too often government responses to international disasters are guided by political and economic interests and by racism. The Canadian government cares very little for the victims of a recent earthquake in Iran or the current humanitarian disaster in Sudan. Nor has it done much for those in the Caribbean still suffering the effects of September 2004's Hurricane Ivan. There are no flights to Canada for these victims. Does anyone doubt that the response to the tsunami would have been quite different had the waves hit England and not South Asia?

POLICY FOR ALL VICTIMS

A policy in place for all victims of humanitarian disaster would force the Canadian government to provide assistance, whether or not there was a political or economic benefit.

Although pictures from tsunami affected zones no longer appear on the front pages of newspapers, rest assured that the suffering continues. Only a tiny portion of the money that was donated to charities, or that was committed by governments, has actually been spent on bettering the lives of survivors.

The situation for people in tsunami-affected zones remains critical, and NGOs estimate that it will take at least one year before serious gains are made in rebuilding the affected areas. In the meantime, tsunami refugees try to survive in overcrowded camps. Given the slow pace of reconstruction, it is essential that effective options are available for people to leave the affected areas, if they so choose. ★

Notes on psychiatric torture

Human rights violations in psychiatry

BY DON WEITZ

I was tortured for six weeks. It happened over 50 years ago, in December 1951 and January 1952. I was forcibly subjected to a series of 110 sub-coma insulin shocks which psychiatrist Douglass Sharpe prescribed as a treatment for "schizophrenia." I was never "schizophrenic" or "mentally ill"—just a confused college student struggling to find myself, a common identity crisis medicalized for the benefit of my parents and psychiatrists.

Dr. Sharpe prescribed a series of insulin shock treatments for me because I was openly angry and defiant toward my parents and the world. Here's a telling statement by Dr. Sharpe in my medical records: "The patient was finally placed on sub-coma insulin and after a month of sub-coma insulin three times a day he showed tremendous improvement. There was no longer the outbursts of anger...He spends most of his time trying to figure out what the effect of insulin has on him..."

It took me almost 15 years to understand my forced psychiatric incarceration and treatment in political terms, 15 years to realize that I was a political prisoner of psychiatry: locked up against my will, tortured, no right to a hearing or trial before losing my freedom, no right to appeal. Insulin shock, like electroshock and lobotomy, was obviously a form of social control and torture—not treatment. Shock silenced me—temporarily.

Insulin shock was a serious violation of my human rights. It radicalized me and made me permanently sensitive to many other human rights violations which psychiatrists have committed and are still committing against thousands of allegedly "mentally ill" people under the guise of "safe and effective treatment," "medication," "ECT," or "mental health reform."

Everyone has the fundamental right not to be treated against his or her will, abused or tortured. This right is enshrined in the *United Nations Convention Against Torture*, and its *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which was signed over 56 years ago on December 10, 1948 by over 40 nations including Canada and the United States. Many people, including psychiatrists and medical students, ignore or never bother to read these historic human rights documents. They should, as should everyone.

Psychiatric survivors typically experience their forced treatment, or their treatment without "informed consent," as inhumane punishment or torture. Psychiatrists rarely inform their patients about the many serious effects and risks of their treatments, or of any alternative treatments (especially non-medical community alternatives such as self-help or advocacy groups and drop-ins run by psychiatric survivors). And yet "informed consent" is explicitly required according to Ontario's *Health Care and Consent Act* and the historic 1947 *Nuremberg Code*. Whenever psychiatrists and other doctors prescribe "antipsychotic medication"—powerful mind-disabling neuroleptics such as Haldol, Thorazine (chlorpromazine), Clozapine (clozaril), Modecate/Moditen, Risperdal (risperidone), or Zyprexa (olanzapine), as well as antidepressants such as Dyserel, Elavil, Paxil and Prozac—without your informed consent, they are assaulting you, punishing you, violating the Code, violating the UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, violating your human rights.

Neuroleptic literally means "nerve-seizing." These psychiatric drugs—euphemistically called "anti-psychotic medication"—are extremely powerful and debilitating, always producing painful and serious "side effects," some life-threatening or fatal: muscle cramps, dizziness, blurred vision, seizures, tardive dyskinesia (a permanent neurological disorder characterized by involuntary movements), akathisia (restless pacing), nightmares, psychosis, parkinsonism, neuroleptic malignant syndrome (a neurological disorder with a 2%-3% prevalence rate and 20%-30% mortality rate), and sudden death. Tardive dyskinesia, neuroleptic syndrome (NMS) and parkinsonism are signs of brain damage. After weeks or months on such "medication", most patients look and act like zombies, apathetic, indifferent to their surroundings. Many psychiatric survivors and other critics describe this as a "chemical lobotomy."

Electroshock is another high-risk, degrading and inhumane psychiatric treatment and social control weapon. It is chiefly prescribed for severe "depression," "bipolar mood disorder" and sometimes "schizophrenia." Its main targets are women and the elderly. Despite denials and misinformation by the Canadian Psychiatric Association and American Psychiatric Association, the scientific fact is that "ECT" always causes some brain damage including permanent memory loss—even death, which is typically minimized or covered up. According to many professional critics in the US (such as psychiatrist Peter Breggin and neurologist John Friedberg) electroshock is an "electrically-induced closed head injury." One doesn't have to be a

"No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Article 5, United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

"Everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment"

Section 12, Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Don Weitz is an antipsychiatry activist, member of the Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault (CAPA), the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), and host-producer of "Antipsychiatry Radio" on CKLN in Toronto. He is also a co-editor of Shrink Resistant *with Dr.Bonnie Burstow.*

doctor or scientist to understand that 150-200 volts (electrical outlets in homes are usually 120 volts) of electricity delivered to the brain for 1-2 seconds or longer, 3 times a week for weeks or months, will damage the brain—permanently. Nevertheless, the shock doctors, other psychiatrists and medical reporters in the mainstream media continue to make the absurd and deceitful claim that the ECT seizure is "therapeutic." But if seizures are so therapeutic, why do neurologists bother trying to prevent them (like in cases of epilepsy)?

Women who are shock survivors have frequently and appropriately called electroshock "psychiatric rape." Electroshocking senior citizens is another form of elder abuse, a serious human rights violation. Many critics, myself included, call shock a crime against humanity and want it banned.

Victims of psychiatric assault demonstrate in Washington's Freedom Plaza on May 2, 1998 during an event organized by pro-psychiatry and pro-forced "treatment" groups.

PHYSICAL RESTRAINTS

The use of 4-point and 5-point restraints and solitary confinement ("seclusion") on psychiatric wards is very common, particularly alarming and dangerous. The many psychiatric patients and survivors I've talked with describe the restraints as cruel punishment or torture. The restraints consist of thick leather cuffs or straps tied around the patient's ankles and wrists and anchored to the sides of the bed. Trapped in these restraints, patients can barely move and are often forced to lie flat on their backs for hours at a time, sometimes days with only brief restraint-free periods. Physically restrained patients are also chemically restrained by the powerful neuroleptics or antidepressants.

Psychiatric staff commonly claim that this restraint of mind and body is necessary to "control" or "manage" allegedly disruptive patient behaviour. It is also said to help deal with staff shortages. Whatever the reason (or excuse), the fact remains that patients experience such restraint as severe punishment or torture.

To the best of my knowledge, there have been no significant restrictions in the use of restraints in Ontario's psychiatric hospitals and wards. In the early 1990s, lawyer and former patient advocate Duff Waring published research criticizing the overuse of restraints in Ontario's 10 provincial psychiatric hospitals. But, predictably, there was no media or public outcry, no remedial actions taken.

There was also no public outrage over the brutal death of 26-year-old Zdravko Pukec on September 26, 1995 in Whitby Psychiatric Hospital. Pukec was a recent immigrant from Croatia. He didn't speak English. At the time of his death, he was restrained with neuroleptics and cuffs. A head nurse, with the approval of administrator Ron Ballantyne in Whitby, called the Durham branch of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) to help deal with Pukec. The police pepper-sprayed Pukec on the ward. He died 30 minutes later. The inquest that followed was a sham. "Positional asphyxia"—not pepper spray or police assault—was named as a major cause of death. No psychiatric staff or police were criticized, and no police were charged. As usual, deaths on psychiatric wards and in psychoprisons are covered up.

Thousands of psychiatric survivors in North America are targeted for forced drugging in a clinic, doctor's office, or in their own homes. In Ontario, outpatient forced psychiatric drugging is called "community treatment orders" (CTOs). These "leash laws" control the lives of hundreds of innocent people and violate their human rights in the community by putting them on months or indefinite periods of psychiatric probation. If psychiatric survivors refuse to take the "medication" or see a doctor in the community as ordered, they can be forcibly returned to the hospital by the police or a member of an "ACT" team (assertive community treatment team)—psychiatric police—and locked up without a hearing or trial. CTOs became legal when the Harris government in Ontario passed "Brian's law", an amendment to the *Mental Health Act*, on December 1, 2000. Forced psychiatric drugging in the community is called "involuntary outpatient committal" in the United States, where it's legal in over 41 states. It's also legal in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, and will probably become law in Manitoba.

CTOs, as well as the pro-psychiatry Consent and Capacity Board which rubber-stamps psychiatrist-ordered CTOs, need to be challenged in court as severe violations of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Outpatient forced drugging laws violate "the right not to be subjected to cruel and unusual treatment," the "right not to be subjected to arbitrary detention" and "the right to life, liberty and security of the person." We also need provincial and federal whistleblower laws, which don't exist in Canada.

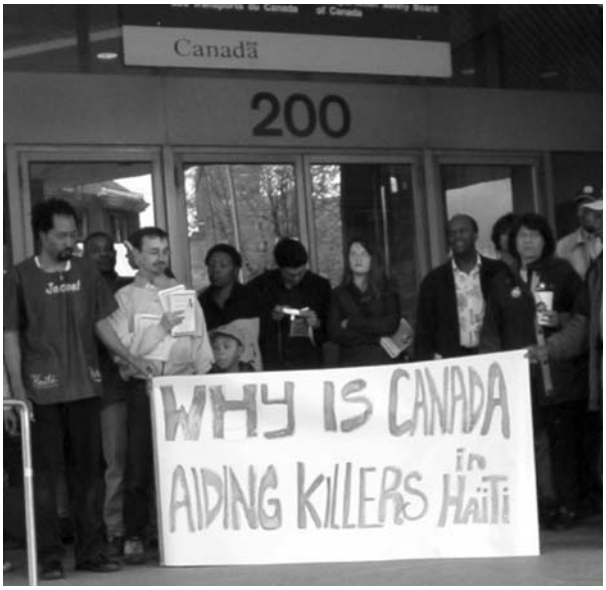
Unless social activists and concerned citizens speak out, protest and demand action and accountability from government, the police and psychiatry, expect more "leash laws", more psychiatric abuses, more cover-ups, more stigmatizing, more stereotyping, more suicides, more patient deaths.

December 10 is International Human Rights Day, but *every* day should be Human Rights Day. Everyday, we should remember and celebrate the lives of many courageous psychiatric survivors, political prisoners, colleagues and friends, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters who did not survive while struggling against psychiatric oppression and for human rights and freedom. Everyday, we should dedicate ourselves to the fight against psychiatric and state oppression and for human rights. We owe them and ourselves that much. ★

For more information, visit:
www.psychiatricsurvivorarchives.com,
www.mindfreedom.org, www.ect.org,
capa.oise.utoronto.ca, and
www.geocities.com/sueclark2001ca.html

Haiti's Canada-backed coup

An Interview with Haiti solidarity activist Jean Saint-Vil



The Ottawa Haiti Solidarity Committee (Kozayiti) holds a demonstration and leaflet session at head offices of CIDA in Gatineau for Haiti Flag Day, May 18, 2005.

On February 29th, 2005 progressive and popular Haitian president Jean Bertrand Aristide was ousted from power in a military coup that was (and remains) actively assisted by the US, France and Canada. KEVIN SKERRETT interviewed JEAN SAINT-VIL about the current situation in Haiti and Canada's involvement.

KS: *Recent human rights reports describe a very grim situation in post-coup Haiti. Independent investigative reports from the University of Miami and Harvard, and now Amnesty International and United Nations (UN) investigators, all are concluding that the human rights situation in the country is a disaster. The Harvard report describes a campaign of terror by the Haitian National Police against the residents of poor neighbourhoods known for supporting President Aristide and the Lavalas movement* [the mass movement to which Aristide's party belongs —NS]. *Can you update us on the current picture?*

JSV: Well it is still a situation of terror. There have been many attempts to have demonstrations in Haiti demanding the return of the President and constitutional government. Every time there is a demonstration, there is a high likelihood that people are going to get killed. So the repression is continuing.

And the UN is participating in this. During the daytime, you do not see UN forces actually shooting at people. You have the Haitian police doing the shooting and the UN forces providing back-up.

KS: *You mention the role of the UN as problematic. My sense is that at times it has played a positive role, protecting demonstrations, but other times it has blocked demonstrations or even stood by while Haitian police carry out attacks. It's almost like there's a struggle going on over what the UN forces are going to do.*

JSV: There has been a struggle like this from the beginning. There'd be statements from the UN commander that he is receiving significant pressure from Canada and the US to use more violence, and then next thing you know there's an escalation in violence. Then, when the University of Miami and Harvard reports came out, the UN forces worked to reduce violence by demanding that the Haitian National Police stay away from demonstrations. With UN protection, demonstrations happened without anyone being shot. Because of this, the UN was even being applauded by people in the poor neighbourhoods. But this honeymoon lasted about a week and then the UN returned to their previous role.

KS: *Let's talk about Canada's involvement. A lot of Canadian money is being sent to support the coup. What muddies the situation is that this aid is being channeled through development agencies and NGOs that are otherwise very progressive and part of the anti-war movement. These groups are linked in Haiti to individuals and groups on the ground who supported the coup. They see themselves supporting a unanimous social and popular movement of opposition to Aristide who had lost all of his support. How would you explain this drastic mis-reading of the situation?*

JSV: It's amazing to me that these groups don't understand what's happening in Haiti, given that a very similar thing happened in Venezuela, where the US worked to foment opposition to Chavez by working through NGOs. Haiti is seeing the same kind of infiltration by NGOs we saw in Venezuela. The model of US imperialism is no longer what it was in 1980, where the military just goes in, conducts the coup and then gets out. Imperialism today is conducted behind the illusion of humanitarianism, and that's why NGOs are important and why imperialists have infiltrated them.

The involvement of NGOs and development agencies in the imperialist agenda is partly explained by how Aristide was represented in the media. Aristide was portrayed as someone who climbed to power because of his personal charisma and ability to manipulate the public. This played into racist and classist perspectives that see the Haitian people as unintelligent and easily duped. It also hid the fact that the coup

Kevin Skerrett is an activist with the Ottawa anti-war group Nowar-Paix, and the Ottawa Haiti Solidarity Committee (Kozayiti).

Jean Saint-Vil is an Ottawa-Gatineau based activist and journalist, a member of the Ottawa Haiti Solidarity Committee (Kozayiti) and L'association Canado-Haitien pour sauvegarder la souveraineté d'Haïti (Lachasausha). He has been a featured political analyst on CBC television's (now cancelled) Counterspin, *CPAC's* Talk Politics, *and CBC Radio's* The Current. *He is also the host of CKCU-FM's* "Rendez-Vous Haitien" *and CHUO-FM's* "Bouyon-Rasin."

involved not only the overthrow of the President, but also of seven thousand other elected officials.

KS: *And that's seven thousand officials whose election was never questioned even by the OAS (Organization of American States) and pro-US international observer groups.*

JSV: No. Supporters of the coup have been claiming that the election that put Aristide's people in power was never legitimate to begin with. But we may reply that if Aristide had stolen the election in 2000, who did he steal it from? There's no figure emerging in the post-coup situation, no political party, nothing. People knew that if Aristide was forced out of power there would be chaos in Haiti because it would create a complete vacuum. All you have now are people from the "Republic of Port-au-Prince" claiming to represent people who don't see them as their representatives: essentially petty bourgeois politicians, all Port-au-Prince based, without connections with the peasantry claiming to represent the majority of the population in the inner country or in the poor urban areas, like Bel-Air and Cité Soleil.

In Haiti, there is very little connection between the peasantry, the middle class and the rich. People are basically in their different corners. Lavalas, back in 1990, had clear connections between the peasantry and the middle class, and even some people like Jean Dominique, who were actually part of the rich class.

KS: *It was a multi-class movement at that point?*

JSV: Absolutely. And it had a future, if it wasn't for the military coup of 1991.

KS: *So you're saying what was once a multi-class coalition in the early Aristide period was abandoned by the middle class and bourgeois elements, leaving Lavalas and Aristide with a political movement which was narrowed to the peasant class and the poor (which of course still constitutes a huge percentage of the population)?*

JSV: Yes, Aristide's social base became that huge percentage of the population comprised of peasants and the poor. But it is a population that doesn't have access to state power. Those who left Aristide blamed him for indirectly orchestrating that shift by relying increasingly on mob violence or whatever — views that express strong class biases. When the coup took place, some in the poor neighbourhoods managed to get guns from the police who were abandoning their posts. With guns in their hands, these people were defending themselves. Now, we can say that they are not supposed to be using violence, but this is a case of self-defense.

One of the key things that has to happen if Haiti is to get out of this hell is the complete cancellation of Haiti's $1 billion-plus (US) foreign debt

KS: *We just had May 18, Haiti's Flag Day, marked by coordinated political demonstrations across Canada and the US in solidarity with the people of Haiti. I wonder if you can update us on the state of the solidarity movement — where its going, how it can intervene, and what kind of demands it can articulate?*

JSV: The solidarity movement can do a lot, because while the conflict has a national dimension, its international dimension is even more important. Haiti's national budget is utterly dependent on IMF/WB loans and grants, so Haiti remains incredibly dependent on the US, Canada, France, EU, etc.

I think the movement outside Haiti is significant because one of the key things that has to happen if Haiti is to get out of this hell is the complete cancellation of Haiti's $1 billion-plus (US) foreign debt. This debt has to go, given that most of it is leftover from the thirty-year Duvalier dictatorship. Organizations representing the interests of international capital keep the people poor while claiming to advance the fight against corruption.

KS: *This connects to my next question. Elections are planned for October, November and December. There is a risk that we'll see another sham exercise, as we have seen to different degrees in Afghanistan and Iraq. There is a pattern of setting up internationally-monitored elections in places where regime change has taken place, as a way to legitimize and sanction that change. How can solidarity activists intervene?*

JSV: The main thing we need to do is focus on certain principles. Until we get a legitimate leadership elected in Haiti, until we get Haiti in the hands of Haitians — not the sham we have now where you have the US, Canada and France running the country through a puppet — you are going to have violence. You cannot be talking about real elections when Yvon Neptune, Aristide's Prime Minister — the only legitimate one — is in jail. The fact that he has been detained for almost a year without charges, shows that he should be released.

Of course, the Haitian bourgeoisie doesn't want real elections, because if they take place the Lavalas candidate is going to win. And since the demographic of Haiti isn't going to change, there's no way around the problem. The only option for the bourgeoisie is to try to institute a dictatorship. But if there's a move in that direction, I can guarantee you there's going to be a fight from the population.

KS: *Because it will be a class dictatorship, a coalition of the very wealthy, with some elements of the middle class.*

JSV: Yes, and unfortunately there have been recent signals that the US, Canada and France want to prop up the Haitian elite.

And you know, there's also a racial undertone to this that's very dangerous. A lot of the members of this Haitian elite are not of African origin. 97% or 98% of the population is of African origin, so the elites are playing with fire. What do you think is going to happen if you keep pitting this one group of Haitians against the vast majority who happen to be impoverished, who happen to be blacker than the group who is enjoying power?

We have to make sure that international solidarity activists are well-informed to influence the politicians to do the right thing. If we don't learn from what happened in Haiti, and if organizations such as the NGOs, peace activists, the labour movement and the NDP don't get their act together, we will find ourselves in a situation where coups led by the US against countries like Cuba or Venezuela will take place with Canadian complicity again. ★

Resources on the current situation in Haiti: www.zmag.org and www.haitiaction.net. To subscribe to the email info-list for the Canada-Haiti Action Network (CHAN), email Kevin Skerrett at kskerrett@cupe.ca

The hopes and limitations of popular forces

For the second time in two years, mass protests in Bolivia have toppled a president. Militant upsurges of indigenous people, workers and peasants paralyzed the country's largest cities thorughout early June, producing a national crisis. JEFFERY R. WEBBER *reports on the background to these events and what might lie ahead.*

In what has become near ritualistic behavior, Bolivian President Carlos Mesa Gisbert appeared on television at 9:30pm Monday, June 6, 2005 to address the nation with his latest dramatic gesture, another offer of resignation.

On March 6, 2005 he announced his first revocable "resignation" on television, denouncing various social movements that were blockading the country, and citing the necessity of following every dictate of imperial power, from the World Bank, to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to the United States Embassy, among many others. There was no other choice according to Mesa's logic. His role as President was to take their orders, and if some crazy Indians had different notions about how Bolivia ought to be run, well they didn't understand the way "democracy" works these days.

A few weeks later, faced with further mobilizations by popular forces and demands from the far Right to crush heads, Mesa called for moving the presidential elections forward, then set for 2007. In both cases, the necessary approval of Congress was not forthcoming, as Mesa predicted. "The Colonial President," as Luis Tapia recently referred to him as, was able to continue in power, increasingly governing from the Right.

However, popular forces wouldn't let their agenda slide from the face of politics after over seventy were killed in the "Gas War" of October 2003. In that struggle Gonzalo ("Goni") Sánchez de Lozada was removed from power, leaving Mesa—then vice-president—in his place.

Mesa's mandate derived from his promise to carry through the "October Agenda," understood by the mobilized masses to mean (i) the nationalization of hydrocarbons (especially natural gas), (ii) the convocation of a Constituent Assembly to remake the Bolivian state in the interests of the poor indigenous majority, and (iii) a trial of responsibilities for Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada for the crimes he and his closest cronies committed during October 2003.

Mesa failed to carry through the October Agenda, and 2005 has thus far been a year of steadily increasing popular mobilization. Most recently, the "Second Gas War"

Jeffery R. Webber is a PhD candidate in political science at the University of Toronto and a member of the New Socialist Group, presently living in Bolivia. His regular updates are found at www.newsocialist.org.

began on May 16, 2005 with a large march of organizations descending from El Alto to La Paz, led by the Federation of United Neighbors of El Alto (FEJUVE-El Alto). On the same day, a number of peasant-indigenous organizations joined a four-day march from Caracollo to La Paz under the banner of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party, led by Evo Morales.

The demands from El Alto were clearly more radical: nationalization of gas; closing of the Parliament; and the resignation of Carlos Mesa for selling out the October Agenda. The MAS-led march demanded fifty percent well-head royalties to be paid by the transnational petroleum companies to the Bolivian state, instead of the law that passed on March 17 with Mesa's de facto approval, which stipulates only eighteen percent royalties and a thirty-two percent direct hydrocarbons tax. The latter will be easily manipulated by the transnationals, according to critics.

The MAS-led marchers, the various popular organizations from El Alto, the Aymara peasants from the twenty provinces of the department of La Paz, and the miners all began to converge on the capital by May 23, 2005. Since then, the capital has been the scene of dynamite clashes with state police, and eventually military forces, and the continual dosing of downtown with copious amounts of tear gas and rubber bullets. In the final days leading up to Mesa's latest "resignation," that capital was crippled by gas shortages, inflationary prices on basic food products, and water shortages in some neighborhoods.

On June 5, 2005 between four and five hundred thousand protesters took to the streets in La Paz. Standing in the Plaza of Heroes, one could not see the end of the masses in any direction, in any of the surrounding streets. La Paz was occupied, and Mesa was forced to make his televised appearance that evening.

According to the Constitution, because Mesa did not explicitly state that his resignation was irrevocable, it had to be approved by Congress, which unlike in March actually happened this time. Constitutionally, after Mesa's resignation was approved, the presidency would first be offered to hated Right-wing President of Congress, Hormando Vaca Díez, and then (if Vaca Diez refused) to the President of Deputies, Mario Cossío (a member of Goni's old party the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, MNR).

The MAS and many of the social movement organizations at the heart of the Second Gas War demanded that both Vaca Díez and Cossío decline the presidency, allowing for President of the Supreme Court of Justice, Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé, to assume power and push forward with elections. Under immense pressure from the streets, this is exactly what occurred, with Rodriguez accepting the presidency and agreeing to call elections in the coming months.

Still, the field of contention remains unclear, the demands of nationalization and the convening of a Constituent Assembly remain aflame, and the protests continue. It is far too early to determine what will happen next. The movement bases are mobilized in incredibly impressive numbers, but lack a coherent political project for state power. The neoliberal state is in crisis, but has persisted against the odds thus far. How the military will respond to each development is also unclear. If the popular-bloc manages to articulate a unified political project beyond mobilization, the consequences will be of massive significance both for Bolivia and Latin America as a whole. ★

All photos: Jeff Webber. May 16th march from El Alto to La Paz.

The "Orange Revolution"

Ukraine's freedom struggles: today and in the mirror of history

BY CHRIS FORD

A few months ago, thousands took to the streets of Ukraine to carry through the "Orange Revolution", writing a new chapter in the history of the Ukrainian people's struggle for greater freedom and independence. The new President Viktor Yushchenko declared: "We are free. The old era is over. We are a new country now." As if to emphasize closure of the revolution, a "museum of the Orange Revolution" was even opened for the 2005 Eurovision song contest.

But is Ukraine really free and the old era over? These are key questions for socialists.

UKRAINE'S REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

Ukraine has been plundered over the centuries by neighbouring powers that denied the country self-determination. After the 1648 revolution, its rulers looked to Moscow for protection, a road that led to Ukraine becoming a Russian colony and subjected to Tsarist policies of Russification. Russian-dominated urban centres developed on the backs of the Ukrainian peasantry.

Capitalist development in Ukraine only heightened this colonial servitude, resulting in a national/cultural division of labour. Large sections of migrant Russians acquired the higher paid, skilled positions, while Ukrainians constituted the low wage, flexible labour layer of the economy. Russian was literally the language of the bosses.

Under this colonial situation, for national liberation to succeed it had to coincide with the social emancipation of the labouring masses. This characterized two periods of revolutionary upheaval in Ukraine: 1917-20 and 1942-1947.

What distinguished the Ukrainian revolution of 1917 from the Russian one was its anti-colonial nature. At its forefront were

Ukraine has a strong history of anti-colonial mass struggle.

Socialists and Marxists with mass support, and it culminated in the Ukrainian People's Republic. The embryonic government's founding declaration included calls for "representatives of the workers…establishment of state control over industry," an "eight-hour workday", "transfer of land without compensation to the working people", "instead of a standing army, a people's militia", "state-people's control over all banks", and the abolition of "exploitations by the banks or for profiteering."

The Bolsheviks in Ukraine, failing to see the importance of national liberation, excluded themselves from the Ukrainian Revolution. This weakened the evolution of the radical policies of the Rada (parliament) which became restricted within national bourgeois-democratic boundaries—much to the detriment of struggles from below pushing for greater radicalism.

In October 1917 there was a synthesis of the Russian and the Ukrainian revolutions. But the development towards a Ukrainian socialist revolution was retarded by those leaders in the Rada opposed to the Russian workers' republic. The Rada had so departed from the aspirations of the Ukrainian people that it had already lost its base of support by the time it was dispersed by the Red Army in February 1918. In the supposed defence of sovereignty, Ukraine was handed over by these leaders to German, Austrian and Polish occupations.

In the 1920's a national renaissance under the slogan "away from Moscow" became the engine of efforts by Ukrainian Communist dissidents. But as Stalinism and Russian chauvinism strengthened, the dynamics of centralism destroyed the last vestiges of national equality.

In the 1930's, a combination of rapid industrialisation and forced collectivisation lead to a mass plundering of Ukraine by and for Russia. Over seven million died in the artificial famine in 1932-33; another million were deported to Siberia. Those who sought to commemorate, analyse or protest this tragedy risked imprisonment or worse. The aftermath of this famine created in the name of "socialism" saw a generation turn to revolutionary nationalism.

RESURGENCE AND DECLINE

The Ukrainian Revolution saw a fresh resurgence during the Second World War. The experience of Nazi rule soon saw an armed resistance movement develop against both Hitler and Stalin. The new resistance coalesced into the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) to fight "against the German and Russian imperialistic invaders," for an "an Independent Unified Ukrainian State" and a "new just order in Ukraine without any landlords, capitalists or Soviet commissars."

Chris Ford is a socialist activist based in England. He writes for Prospekt Pravdu *(Kharkiv paper of the Socialist Party of Ukraine) and is the author of a forthcoming history of the Ukrainian socialist movement during the period 1905-1920 (Ibidem-Verlaag, 2006).*

16 days of mass mobilization shook all cities and regional centres of Ukraine during the 2004 Orange Revolution.

The insurgency was broken in 1947 when the Russian and Polish Stalinists ethnically cleansed areas of Western Ukraine, deporting over 150,000 people. The defeat of the insurgency and the consolidation of the Stalinist system led to over forty years of totalitarian rule free of mass liberation struggles. Though there were repeated efforts by courageous workers and intellectuals to challenge the regime, this only prompted fresh campaigns of Russian chauvinism. In 1972 Moscow attacked "national deviations" and launched waves of arrests of Ukrainian dissidents. Ukraine throughout the 1970's and 1980's was a time of increased Russification and repression; once again Ukrainian dissidents began to fill the gulag.

NEW RESURGENCE AND PULL OF RETROGRESSION

A new movement appeared in the summer of 1988 in Western Ukraine with the formation of the People's Movement of Ukraine (the Rukh). The Rukh came out for a republic based on "self-management" with "peasants becoming owners of the land, and workers of the industrial enterprises."

But this social and democratic sentiment soon withered as neoliberal ideas gained hegemony. The vision of the movement narrowed to one of a "free market" economy, EU integration and parliamentary democracy. The new leaders abandoned the masses and the goal of creating an alternative not only to the rival imperialist blocs but to the capitalist system they rested upon.

This retrogression gained momentum from the new cold war of Reagan and Thatcher and the dominance of the idea that "there is no alternative" to capitalism. Stalinism, the stagnation in Eastern Europe and the impoverishment of the Third World were taken as evidence of the failure of "socialism." Throughout the 1980's, neoliberal ideas permeated swathes of the official economists, planners, advisors and academics of the Eastern Bloc, cascading even through the very dissident intellectuals and opposition movements the regimes had persecuted. This situation was exacerbated by the decline of the socialist project in the Western labour movements and compounded by the absence of a significant solidarity movement with the anti-Stalinist struggles.

With capitalism emblazoned on the banner of the movement, an effort to restore private capitalism was launched. The struggle for independence became based on a narrow concept of freedom that associated democracy with private ownership and freedom with the free market. All this allowed the rulers to sleep more easily.

"CRONY CAPITALISM"

The roots of the "Orange Revolution" began when the ruling bureaucracy, under pressure from below, and realizing it could only retain power if it controlled the passage from the command state-capitalist economy to a privatised "free-market" economy, entered into an unspoken alliance with the national-democratic forces.

At the same time, there emerged an independent workers movement in eastern Ukraine that formed a bloc with the movement from Western Ukraine in favour of independence. In the spring of 1991 miners strengthened the push to independence by demanding that the republic take over ownership and management of industry.

All this created conditions for a declaration of independence in the Rada on August 24, 1991 and the crumbling of the USSR. Independence was massively endorsed, despite Russian threats, in a referendum on December 1st, 1991 in which 84% of the population participated and 90% voted "yes."

When an independent Ukraine set upon a transition to a private capitalist economy, it was hit by the global economic crisis of the early 1990's. In 1994 the government of Leonid Kuchma responded with austerity measures, including a program of privatisation that pried open the state monopolies allowing the old elite to construct private business empires. Organized into mafia-styled "clans," they accumulated vast amounts of capital in the 1990's and were guarded by the state. Expressions such as "crony capitalism" and "clan regime" have been coined to describe this new arrangement.

The clans grew on the basis of their domestic trade, and trade in Russian oil and gas. They were a conduit for Russia to reassert itself in Ukraine. The result was that Russian capital bought up some 40% of privatised state assets.

A new kind of parliamentary politics grew under crony capitalism—a virtual reality politics, where, for instance, the Green Party is backed by bankers and energy businesses. The Kiev clan ran the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United), the Donetsk oligarchs the Party of Regions, Dnipropetrovs'k clan the Labour Party. The oligarchs bankrolled Kuchma, who in turn molded the state to accommodate these arrangements. By

2004 over 300 of the 450 members of the parliament were dollar millionaires and deputies immune from criminal prosecution.

State authorities in concert with the clans began to dominate all important markets and prevented small business from operating freely without sharing profits with them. The change in the composition of the parliament was hailed by international capital. Kuchma appointed a government under Viktor Yushchenko, an IMF favourite. Yushchenko's policies were monetarist, they accelerated privatisation and brought capital accumulation in the shadow economy under greater control (which gave him a populist mystique).

On September 16, 2000 the murder of journalist Georgiy Gongadze, a critic of the oligarchs, sparked a new phase in struggle led by the Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU) against the government and Yushchenko. The SPU is a centrist party with 40,000 members that has a mix of reformist social democratic and Marxian socialist politics. The SPU described post-independence Ukraine as "a criminal state." They called for a "transition to a society of democratic socialism" beginning with the "removal of the clan regime" from political-economic power and the extension of democracy.

Secretly taped recordings implicated Kuchma in Gongadze's murder, detonating opposition to the oligarchic regime. The authorities responded by banning all protest. This bought them some time, allowing "crony capitalism" over the next four years to become increasingly decadent. But opposition began to take shape.

OPPOSITION CRYSTALLIZES

By the time of the 2004 election, a faction of the capitalist class, seeing the "clan regime" as a hindrance to their capital accumulation, had formed. Yulia Tymoshenko and then Yushchenko formed rival political blocs opposed to Kuchma. The haemorrhage accelerated when numerous members of the government and Kuchma's parliamentary faction defected.

Approximately a third of the committee at the helm of the Yushchenko movement consisted of business people. It also had the support of a new middle class that found the oligarchy unbearable. Finally, the Confederation of Free Trade Unions (CFTUU), with three million members, mobilizing on the question of democracy, joined the opposition bloc, with one of its leaders elected to the parliament.

The social mobilizations that burst forth did not shift political power to a new class intent on transforming the social system.

These opposition currents crystallized during the 2004 presidential elections. Kuchma nominated Victor Yanukovich, regarded as the public face of Ukraine's largest, most brutal, oligarchic clan. Meanwhile, Yushchenko campaigned on a platform of ending what he called "the clan oligarchic system," bringing the economy out of the shadows, the defense of civil rights and accession to the European Union.

The Yanukovich team resorted to massive electoral fraud. Later estimates consider at least 2.8 million ballots were rigged in favour of Yanukovich. But when he was initially declared winner, the opposition refused to recognise it. Yushchenko stepped in, declared himself president and called for a general strike and for the allegiance of state organs. The student organisation Pora was first to respond and organize a protest. Though organizers expected 16,000-20,000 people, 100,000 turned out within 8 hours of the call being made. On one occasion it grew to a million!

So began 16 days of mobilization in all cities and regional centres of Ukraine that led to new elections and Yushchenko's victory.

THE ORANGE REVOLUTION

The social mobilizations that burst forth did not shift political power to a new class intent on transforming the social system. It is a shift towards a more democratic state form under a changed government, headed by a different stratum within the ruling class, made possible by the social weight of the majority of the alienated middle and working classes. While it is the expression of deep social unrest, we have not seen a social revolution in Ukraine. The system that underpins the oligarchs and their position remains utterly untouched by the "Orange Revolution."

The Ukrainian working class has been politically submerged in a bloc where it lacks a clear independent expression of its own interests. Some unions and the SPU rightly supported the struggle for democracy but they have failed to project an independent perspective which ties democracy to a goal of workers' liberty.

The new government reflects the varied composition and contradictions of the bloc of democratic forces which led the recent resurgence. On the one hand, there has been a noticeable increase in civil liberties and media freedoms, real weight put into justice for Gongadze. There have also been some reforms concessionary to the working class (such as an increase to average pensions and public sector salaries). All this is to the annoyance of neo-liberals who consider the "orange revolution" their own.

But on the other hand there is no program to take into social ownership the property privatised by the oligarchs, and redistribute the wealth. Yushchenko offered amnesty for people who acquired fortunes by dubious means and named only 29 businesses to be judicially reviewed (leaving 377, 391 in the hands of the oligarchs!)

How socialists relate to these events raises the question of the relationship of socialism and democracy. It is necessary to restate that revolutionary socialists, as champions of democracy, see capitalist democracy as limited, deformed by class divisions, restricted to the political sphere and a cloak for the rule of capital. By contrast, a workers' government requires the widest self-management and extension of democracy. But revolutionary socialists are not indifferent to democracy under capitalism. The struggle for socialism can best be conducted under conditions most favourable to the working class, with the widest democratic rights, freedom to organize ourselves, to publish, to strike, to vote for our own representatives. These liberties are indispensable in the struggle for a workers' government, and socialists should always move to extend and deepen them as part of a struggle that will not stop there but make revolution continuous—towards one which is social and democratic!

To that end one must conclude that there remains in Ukraine an unfinished revolution. ★

Radicalizing then and now

Interviews with three socialists

Below we print interviews with three socialists who became politically active in different times—SANDRA SARNER in the mid-1970s, SHEILA WILMOT in the mid-1980's and KATHERINE GRZEJSZCZAK in our current post-9/11 era. NEIL BRAGANZA asked each about how the circumstances in which one becomes politically active affects how one learns about and develops socialist politics. The discussion also turns to the question of how we might assess the current political context in Canada and think about the challenges of radicalizing today.

Sandra Sarner

Sheila Wilmot

Katherine Grzejszczak

WHEN YOU BECAME POLITICALLY ACTIVE, WHAT WAS THE CONTEXT OF STRUGGLE?

Sandra: I became politically active in the mid-1970's, when there was excitement around the revolutionary situation in Portugal. People—socialists—felt the possibility of revolution in an immediate way. We followed the daily events in Portugal, where workers took control of factories and communities and there was a volatile political situation that could have resulted in people taking democratic control of society from below.

Obviously, the context in Toronto wasn't anything like it was in Portugal. But a vibrant women's movement was beginning, as were mobilizations around gay rights and against the offensive the far-right was making at the time. There were a lot of workers going on strike and challenging their bosses around wages and other issues. Now it wasn't like there was a general strike in the city or anything, but there were picket lines around different issues at different times that we could go out to and get involved with and get to know the workers. The strikes often ended with people making a enough gains to feel they were returning victorious. But though it was an exciting time for socialists, the excitement wasn't overwhelming. Daily life was like it is today except social services weren't as decimated in those days. The neoliberal attack was only beginning.

Sheila: I radicalized in 1986, when I got involved with anti-apartheid solidarity work at the University of Guelph. I was an unconscious feminist at that point—it took someone to call me a feminist a year later before I identified as one. I didn't have a strong sense of the historical period, but I did have a sense that apartheid was unjust. I attached myself to the anti-apartheid struggle because of all the organizing on campus, but my understanding of international solidarity was fairly limited.

Katherine: I became politically active about three years ago in 2002 when, at the university of Toronto, I found some far left organizing to plug into. I had looked in several places on and off campus but people didn't seem serious. Things got better once the anti-war organizing started. People I radicalized with were involved in student anti-war work and the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP). That was when OCAP seemed, at least from my perspective at the time, stronger and better organized than it seems today.

HOW DID YOU AND PEOPLE LIKE YOU SEE PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE? WHAT SEEMED POSSIBLE?

Sandra: When I radicalized, I belonged to a small socialist organization. We had a vision of an alternative society based on workers' control moving toward a classless society. We discussed those possibilities and what would change. But to get a sense of the possibilities, we had to do the same things as we do today—participate in mass struggles. I remember a large demonstration that stopped people from attending a talk by Anita Bryant, a right-wing Christian fundamentalist who was very anti-abortion and anti-gay. Moments like those were exciting—as people today know from experiences like in Québec city 2001.

Sheila: Because of where the anti-apartheid project was at in 1986—it was the time of the divestment projects, which were succeeding internationally—you felt part of an international movement that was going to work, that was going to bring down apartheid. This really affected me with my radicalization. I felt that collective action can change things (or rather, I thought "if you take action and care, you can change things"). Interestingly enough, by the way, people like me—white folks—

Sandra Sarner is a member of the Toronto New Socialist Group. She continues to get inspiration from young socialists who radicalize despite the difficult times.

Sheila Wilmot was a community activist for a number of years. She currently does more reflecting and writing than acting.

Katherine Grzejszczak is a sociology student at the University of Toronto and a member of the New Socialist Group.

Neil Braganza is an editor of New Socialist.

The Portuguese Revolution of 1974 gave socialists around the world the palpable sense that radical social change was possible. Here, people greet rank-and-file soldiers on the streets of Portugal in April 1974.

got involved with anti-racist work only when it had to do with international solidarity. We weren't very conscious of the need to do anti-racist work where we were.

Katherine: I wasn't clear about what the prospects were for change. There was a feeling in my milieu that you could mobilize, organize and have large demos and these would somehow grow bigger, stronger and more radical until finally the state would have to capitulate to our demands. But there was never a strong vision forward, or ability to articulate what would happen once struggles got strong enough to effect real change.

DID YOU THINK THERE WAS AN ALTERNATIVE TO CAPITALISM?

Sandra: Yes. Like I said, I was part of a socialist organization, so we were always discussing the socialist alternative to capitalism.

Sheila: Because my starting point was anti-apartheid work as it was done through the PIRGs (the Ontario Public Interest Research Group), I was involved in an eclectic 'think globally, act locally' kind of politics where people felt whatever you did to pitch-in moved things forward. There was an emphasis on local projects and we thought that if we build little community projects (like a food co-op), dress differently, become vegetarian and treat people properly, we can change the world or get some government reforms. And all this was embedded in a non-violent philosophy. I don't believe in a non-violent philosophy anymore—it's more of a practical or strategic question for me now—but that was what we saw as the alternative to capitalism. We thought that if we acted that way, then capitalism would "go away."

Katherine: I thought there was an alternative to capitalism, but it wasn't clear what that alternative was. I think I had more of an anarchist analysis with a focus on the smashing the state but with no analysis of workers democracy and power. Though we would talk about worker exploitation, we weren't involved with workers' struggles, so that was never the focus. When we organized with OCAP and mobilized students for anti-war demos, we were always facing the state. We never organized in workplaces or with people organizing in workplaces. The focus was more on war and occupation rather than capitalist exploitation.

WHO DID YOU AND PEOPLE LIKE YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE?

Sandra: As a revolutionary socialist I saw the agents of social change as being collectively the working class. But there was an understanding—perhaps more primitive than what we have or should have today—that the working class didn't just mean factory workers or the traditional white male worker, but included people in offices, hospitals, government, and that issues of class intersected with those of race and gender. Again, we had much to do to develop the nuances of our theory. We knew that many issues of discrimination come up in union struggles. But while we knew the working class was more than people with jobs—that it included the unemployed, women who stayed at home to take care of the kids, people who worked in community organizations, and so on—there was an emphasis on workers at the point of production as having a particular power to effect change.

Sheila: I guess this question makes me want to define who "I" and "people like me" were at the time and what that social location was. We were mainly middle-class white folks, and I would describe myself as a higher-waged working-class person. We had some idea that "if we build it, they will come"—the "they" being those vague other people who weren't part of "us". We didn't see our whiteness or the lack of a multi-racial character in our work (which unfortunately isn't uncommon). We thought that people locally and globally can change things by doing what we were doing, and we didn't really have a critique of who we were and the various projects we were doing.

Katherine: People in my milieu thought the agents of social change were the large numbers of people at demos and especially the dedicated activists. There was a lack of clarity about how to deal with people who are beginning to radicalize and how to meet people where they are at. People who were starting to radicalize were dismissed as not being radical enough. So the real agents of change were the super radical people who do extremely radical things. Also, OCAP as an organization was seen as The Leadership—a leadership whose choices and actions were not to be questioned or criticized. Unfortunately, it seems OCAP still has that reputation today among university-based youth who are just coming around to activism.

HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE THE CURRENT POLITICAL CONTEXT?

Sandra: Though I'm not as politically active today, I can see there's definitely fewer opportunities to organize around issues on a democratic grassroots level. Everything has shifted so much to the right. And the Left is much smaller. There were many small left organizations in the 70's and maybe close to 1000 or at least 500 self-described revolutionaries in Toronto, with several thousand more in Québec. Plus there were a lot of independent leftists, Marxists, anti-capitalists and so on. Today, the Left is more isolated and weak.

Sheila: I would characterize the current context as a source of great angst and sadness! [laughter] But beyond emotion… I'd say Toronto is similar to other major western cities—broadly speaking—particularly in Canada and the US. Quite simply, the organization that international capital-

ism has reached in this period and the form that it's in, combined with the historic problems that continue to plague the Left, all this means that the ruling class has us by the fucking throats.

Katherine: The political context today is difficult. Organizations seem to be falling apart. And because it's so difficult in this period to organize and mobilize, people don't look to build movements but look for short cuts and turn in hyper-radical directions. I don't identify with the people I radicalized with anymore. I feel I moved beyond the politics that come with just doing activism when I joined a socialist organization. But the organization is extremely isolated. There's no movement around us, never mind one around working class demands. Yet I also think that however difficult it might be in the Canadian state right now, capitalism's continuing neoliberal attack is exacerbating the contradictions of the system, which can only go on for so long before resistance builds and may even explode. The gap between rich and poor has been widening for 30 years, and workers around the world and in Canada continue to lose their rights, their earning power, their social safety net and their standard of living. Things can only worsen for so long before the kind of analysis and answers that socialists have become relevant again.

HOW DOES THIS CONTEXT INFLUENCE THE SCOPE OF WHAT IS IMAGINABLE POLITICALLY?

Sandra: What's imaginable politically, even in the context of the mid-70's in Toronto, was fairly limited if you just fix your imagination on what you saw around you everyday. For socialists today and for people who see themselves as keeping that tradition of struggle alive it's very important to immerse ourselves in the history of the revolutionary struggles of the past in order to help us have that vision. It's very hard to imagine it otherwise. If you look at your neighbors, your co-workers and the people around you, it's hard to imagine how all this can come together and change something.

Sheila: The question breaks things down into objective and subjective conditions, and I don't quite agree with that. Both dimensions are intertwined and integrated. But to answer the question, I'd say the "objective" conditions are suffocating political imagination. If you look at the neoliberal onslaught since the '80s, how it has affected peoples' lives and the opportunities for people to come together to organize or just survive in their daily lives, everything is more difficult—more privatized, individualized and precarious. And in terms of people's sense of what's possible, the Right has been very successful ideologically. Furthermore, on the Left, we just seem unable and/or unwilling to grapple with our fraught history and state of affairs to figure out what to do when the broad conditions are against us. We have imaginary movements, and we have rampant sectarianism around the globe. Whether you look north or south, sectarianism is consistent and current. We have formulaic approaches to organizing (which isn't effective) and we seem unwilling to do that gut-wrenching work of collectively looking at the lay of the land and asking hard questions that may have no good answers.

Katherine: When I discuss politics with people beyond the Left, it seems they can't imagine an alternative to what they face today. That's probably because this generation of Canadian workers has not been part of a workers' movement has won real gains for the working class through struggle. People just think that if they work harder personally, or suck up to their boss more, then they'll get ahead—which as Sheila said is a reflection of the capitalist class's ideological success. It isn't in peoples' minds that if we collectively make demands, then there's a possibility of winning them.

And it's a difficult time for the Left. When I first came around things weren't so low. People who were active for years were still around. But now some are getting to the point where they're saying we can't do anything now and this project isn't worthwhile now. When those with the most experience—the leadership we turn to—give up it makes me feel demoralized about the possibility for organizing. It's difficult because I don't always know what the right thing to do is because I just don't have enough experience.

In the mid 1980's, solidarity work around the international campaign against Apartheid in South Africa radicalized a new generation of socialists. Pictured here is a segregated sports stadium in South Africa.

HOW DOES THIS INFLUENCE WHAT IS POSSIBLE TO ORGANIZE?

Sandra: The political context has lots to do with what's possible to organize. When more people want to work around different political issues, the possibilities for organizing is much greater. But it's important to remember that no matter how quiet it is politically, there are always pockets of struggle and people who are pissed off and prepared to take some sort of action. Unfortunately, we're not always in the position to know where these pockets of struggle are.

The important thing is to always try to get an accurate take on the situation by combining our knowledge of Canadian history, reading the news, knowing what's going on, and discussing and collaborating amongst ourselves and our allies in the areas where we are active in the struggle—trying to honestly assess what the current situation is. When thinking about a possible initiative, there's always the challenge of wanting to play a leading role—to take initiative when there is an audience or a willingness of a certain group of people to move in a particular direction—but playing a role in a way that doesn't hijack the situation but instead provides opportunities to work together with others democratically, allowing various voices to be heard and different people to move into leadership positions. So you want to be able to provide leadership, but you've got to have a good reading of the situation, be honest with yourself, recognize when you've missed opportunities, when you've made mistakes and when to pull back. Political analysis must always accompany action, activity and involvement in struggles.

Sheila: I can give an example of part of what Sandra is talking about, though I have a bit of a different take. I was involved for a few years in a project whose medium- and long-term goal was organizing with low-wage workers. It started with organizing against the gutting of the *Employment Standards Act* in 2000, and then evolved into a minimum-wage campaign. We had good community and organizational connections, a rather multi-racial group, a few languages going and a good political analysis about what we were trying to do and why these were the people we wanted to build political relationships with. But the challenges were huge. How do you meet and connect with low-waged workers? And how can you get low-waged workers consistently in one room together? Given the precarious nature of low-waged work—multiple jobs in multiple worksites—where do people come together in public space anymore? We don't. Sometimes there's church groups and community centers, but people tend to come together more on a family or individual basis as part of their daily struggle to make ends meet. But the fact that people are running around at too-many jobs is not enough of an explanation for why they can't come together. Rather, it's the absence of a forum where someone who is not part of a union or social club can experience a sense of collectivity. It's a huge challenge to figure out the forum and the tool to build political relationships. Our organizing wasn't successful not just because we didn't raise the minimum wage, but because we couldn't build a lasting organization.

"People in my milieu thought the agents of social change were the large numbers of people at demos and especially the dedicated activists."

I'm not suggesting that it comes down to just tactical questions or just having good politics and a good sense of who you should be working with. It's the broader context of the Left and how society has become organized that prevents us from moving forward. Tackling that would help us answer some of the bigger questions we face.

Katherine: I also think that because it's so difficult to mobilize and convince others that some kind of change can be won and pushed for, young activists like the ones I radicalized with turn to a kind of politic where a few people do enough activism for everybody and think the working class needs to be shocked into action because it's numbed and unable to see anything beyond daily work. I don't think you can jump over the objective conditions like that.

Unfortunately, there is no movement going on and so there is nothing for us to intervene into with a socialist perspective. So what do we do? We can't organize movements ourselves. We can participate in broader coalitions that try to organize movements—and I think that's the role of socialists—and try to push those movements in a certain direction with socialist political arguments. But the coalitions of today are really small and turn increasingly to legalistic ways of pushing for change rather than to mass mobilization. That kind of work is not mass mobilizing no matter how many people from the affected community or workplace are involved. And no clever tactic can solve this problem—it's simply the objective conditions of the struggle today in the Canadian state. Small coalitions do win tiny gains (comparatively speaking) through legal channels, which is

positive because that has an effect on people's lives. However, few people participate and feel empowered from that process, and so it's a different type of empowerment than what people get from the mass strikes or demonstrations that make breaks in the social relations of capitalism and the state that represents it. When people feel those breaks, a world of different social relations becomes easier to conceive.

FINALLY, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE RESPONSES OTHERS GAVE TO THESE QUESTIONS? DO YOU THINK PEOPLES' PERCEPTION OF THE PRESENT IS SHAPED BY THE ORIGINAL CONTEXTS OF THEIR RADICALIZATION?

Sandra: It's clear from people's responses that the context and their experiences have a big influence on how people radicalize and on how they see change happening. It also shows that, as people gain experiences of radical protest, they are confronted with different questions and seek a deeper understanding of how society functions and the roots of inequality, injustice, oppression and exploitation.

Finally, I should add that the reason I spoke about radicalizing in a context of revolutionary socialist politics wasn't because these politics were the predominant world view at the time—far from it. In fact, during the time that I became political, others were radicalizing through a variety of activist experiences. For example, there were many different ideas about which group would be in the forefront of revolutionary change—women, students, Third World rebellions.

My situation was such that I radicalized intellectually first, through my university studies, and then became an activist. This may not be typical but I think there are always folks in every generation that come to socialist politics this way. That's another reason it's important for socialists to be as public as possible—especially on campuses. There are always people seeking answers about why human society has got it so wrong and how that can change—even among those who are not in touch with current activism.

Sheila: We are definitely affected by the circumstances in which we radicalize, but what's interesting is that we are not always conscious of how exactly those circumstances have shaped us. I think the influences come into focus when we explore our life experiences from a historical materialist perspective. That perspective begins with people's everyday experiences and asks what those experiences tell us about capitalism and the struggle against it. But it also looks at the struggles that came before us and go beyond us to see what all this can tell us about ourselves, where we are today and what we can do to move struggles forward. Though that kind of historical materialist learning can teach us a lot about ourselves, it is really a collective and social process.

Katherine: I agree that to some extent people's perceptions are shaped by the contexts that politicized them. A good example of this is how peoples' past experiences of mass movements might affect how demoralized they feel about the current situation in the Canadian state. Since I've never been part of large-scale radical mobilizing (and especially one that won a victory), I can't make strong comparisons between today and better times for radicals. I was part of the anti-war demonstrations but I'd argue that by the time they were large they were no longer radical. Since I've been on the left things have been pretty much the same as they are now. I remember when I began making a stronger commitment to the NSG (and the Left in general), a comrade warned me that I shouldn't overwork myself with organizing because this was a lifelong struggle and capitalism wasn't going to be brought down next year. I guess that was the first step on the way to realizing that I should not have any grand expectations from the Left—demos are small, victories few and far in between, activists are bickering amongst themselves and reproducing oppressive relations in their organizing spaces. It's a difficult time for the Left. ★

FEATURE

Workers' democracy: storming heaven

BY CARLOS TORCHIA AND SHIRAZ VALLY

Socialists use the terms socialist democracy or workers' democracy to describe a radical democracy in which working people collectively control all aspects of their own lives and the circumstances in which they live. This includes collective control of the economic sphere such as people's workplaces, the means of producing wealth. Under such a radical democracy people organize themselves for the greater good as opposed to being organized by others for the profit of a few.

No one can predict what a truly democratic society would look like or exactly how to get there, but a look at history reveals examples of working people attempting to take greater control over their lives. This article looks at several such attempts. This is not an exercise in nostalgia: current events unfolding in Latin America, particularly in Bolivia, remind us that the struggle for radical democracy continues. We look at history in order to better understand current struggles and plan for the struggles to come.

A BETTER WORLD IN BIRTH

In 1871 the war between France and the German kingdom of Prussia ended with the defeat of the French army. During the political and economic instability of this period the workers of Paris took control of their city and created what was called the Paris Commune. Karl Marx compared the bold actions of the Parisian workers to "storming heaven." The Paris Commune was unique in that working people played an independent role as a class and began to create their own political structures. These structures represented the Parisians' desires for a better life. What they created during the Commune was very democratic, and radically different from any government that had previously existed.

The Commune took several revolutionary measures which included the abolition of the standing army and police and its replacement by armed citizens; the collectivization of closed factories; elected representatives subject to recall with their salaries capped at the level of the average worker's pay; the establishment of free universal education unencumbered by Church interference; and filling judicial and educational posts by election. It was through these new political structures that workers could begin to question the private ownership of the means of producing wealth, a very frightening prospect for the owners of the means of production throughout Europe.

The experiment of the Paris Commune lasted a little more than two months before it was crushed in a unified effort by the French and Prussian ruling classes. In spite of its short life the Commune was a rich and informative experience. It taught a very important lesson about democracy, one that was picked up by Karl Marx: in order to create a true democracy working people could not just take an already existing state and use it for their own purposes. All existing states are built to manage the affairs of the ruling class and were never designed to lead to social emancipation. In order to create a truly democratic society, where class divisions could be challenged and eliminated, working people had to create new forms of government through which they could rule directly.

WORKERS' COUNCILS

A higher level of the self-organization of working people could be seen in the first Russian Revolution of 1905. The Russian peasantry and the newly established and rapidly growing working class were fed up with the autocratic rule of the Russian monarchy. Their discontent was amplified by Russia's defeat during its war with Japan, which further exposed the corruption of the ruling monarchy. Demonstrations for political reform were violently supressed. Russian workers engaged in massive strikes unparalled in scope or size. Strike committees developed into workers' councils (in Russian, *soviets*).

The soviet, a new weapon in the arsenal of the working class, quickly spread to the point where there were functioning soviets in 55 towns across Russia. The workers' councils not only made demands for political and economic rights but also began to take on the task of governance. The soviets began a process of transformation from mechanisms of self-defence into sites of self-determination for the Russian people. The revolutionary Leon Trotsky referred to the soviets as an example of authentic democracy.

Though the soviets had forced the ruling monarchy to make some political concessions, the soviets themselves were eventually crushed. But lessons were learned. Workers' councils were recognized as a powerful product of a revolutionary working class seeking to organize in a democratic way. However, without

Carlos Torchia and Shiraz Vally are members of the Toronto Branch of the New Socialist Group. This article is based on a presentation they prepared titled "Workers' Power."

a total revolution and seizure of power by the working class, the power of the soviets could not last indefinitely. These lessons were applied by revolutionaries in Russia twelve years later.

Demonstration in front of the House of Representatives in Berlin. The picket sign at the left reads: "All Power to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils."

WORKERS' COUNCILS TAKE POWER

It was during the events of the Russian Revolution of 1917 that the power of workers councils was truly realized. The First World War caused untold misery for millions of people across Europe. The Russian imperial army suffered enormous losses, and there were severe shortages of food, not only in the trenches but also in the cities.

In February 1917 the Russian working class finally overthrew the monarchy and a new government of liberals and reformist socialists was established. This led to a situation of dual power. On one side there was the unelected government, and on the other the re-established workers' and soldiers' councils, which played a decisive role in toppling the monarchy.

The slogan "All Power to the Soviets" put forward by the revolutionary socialist Bolshevik party, expressed a popular desire to move away from the existing political system with a government that wanted to continue the war and maintain existing class relations, toward a government of the working class, an end to war and to the ruling class.

In October 1917 the duality of power was broken in favor of the soviets. The first three years of soviet power constitute a valuable heritage for the international working class. After 1920, the Russian revolution started a course of regression. The reasons for this regression are not within the scope of this article. However, any examination of this regression should look at the decline of the workers' councils as sites of democratic governance.

The Russian working class showed that the capitalist relations of exploitation could be broken by decisive revolutionary actions. The vehicle for this change was their own form of organization which seized power from the ruling class.

THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

Prior to the end of the First World War, opposition to war was also growing amongst the German working class. In 1918 German workers launched a mass strike demanding peace. In October the German military front collapsed and German sailors mutinied in Kiel. By November workers' and soldiers' councils, influenced by the Russian example, were spreading and gaining power.

As in Russia, the monarchy collapsed. A new parliamentary republic was formed in which power was shared between the Social Democratic Party (SDP), whose leaders had supported the war, and the Independent Social Democratic Party (ISDP), formed by anti-war members who had split from the SDP. The SDP believed that capitalism could be reformed through parliament. The ISDP had a "centrist" position (wavering between reformist and revolutionary politics), and believed that the existing parliament and workers' councils could exist side by side. Both parties acted to contain the workers' and soldiers' revolt within certain limits.

The majority of German working people had not yet realized their potential for revolution. For many of the working-class people who fought to bring down the monarchy, the politics of the ISDP, with their mish-mash of reform and revolution, reflected their own developing ideas. Revolutionaries such as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht formed the Communist Party (CP), which saw workers' councils as central to continuing the revolution to overturn not just the monarchy but class exploitation itself. However, this was done late in the game.

By siding with the SDP to form a government after the overthrow of the monarchy, the ISDP put a brake on the momentum of the revolution. For a year and a half after the initial revolution, the ISDP continued to walk a line between noncompliance and compromise with the state. Eventually, in 1920, the majority of ISDP members voted to join with the revolutionary CP. But by then it was too late. The German revolution was soundly defeated and the economic and political structures through which the ruling class dominated remained. Soon the spectre of fascism would be raising its ugly head.

THEN ITALY

Workers in Italy were also inspired by the victory of the Russian workers. In 1917 there were workers' upheavals in the city of Turin. Soon many factories were occupied in reaction to employer lockouts. There were workplace councils in all the main factories of Turin and this phenomenon soon extended to the city of Milan.

The leadership of the Italian Socialist Party (ISP) was largely against revolution and favoured collaboration with the ruling class. As there were revolutionaries in the ISP the leadership was

forced to pay at least some lip service to the workplace occupations. But ISP leaders eventually helped broker a compromise with employers that secured an end to the occupations. The councils soon collapsed. Rising unemployment further dampened workers' resolve and militancy. The fear of a return to such high levels of workers' resistance and organization led many members of Italy's ruling class to invest in fascist organizations

The Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci saw the factory councils as institutions through which a revolution could be realized and as embryos of a future socialist democracy. It was not until 1921, after the defeat of the factory councils, that a revolutionary workers' party was formed that politically supported workers' councils and recognized their true potential.

It is worth comparing the failure of the German and Italian workers' councils to seize power to the Russian success. In all three cases workers' councils were formed as sites of working class self-organization. In each country councils had the capacity of to grow and seize power, yet they did so in only one country.

In the German and Italian cases the absence of a mass revolutionary organization that articulated socialist politics affected the outcome. Though workers' councils were organizations of workers' control and democracy, the consciousness and politics within the councils were often uneven. Revolutionary socialists able to argue revolutionary politics, act decisively during revolutionary periods, and prepare, defend and support the revolutionary process once initiated were weak in Germany and Italy.

No one can predict what a truly democratic society would look like or exactly how to get there, but a look at history reveals several shining examples of working people attempting to take greater democratic control over their lives.

There was a period in Europe, from 1917 to 1920, in which socialist revolution was possible not only in one country. This opportunity was lost in Germany and Italy because of the reformist and opportunistic policies of the social democratic parties and the weakness of the revolutionary forces.

FROM REPUBLIC TO REVOLUTION? SPAIN 1936

Another landmark in the history of working class self-organization was the experience of the urban and rural masses during the Spanish Civil war (1936-1939). In 1931, the Spanish working class threw off the shackles of the monarchy and created a republic. Following this, many working people continued to struggle for even more democracy, challenging the ruling class of the new republic through strikes and uprisings.

A fascist movement led by Franco sought to crush the gains of the workers and peasants; it organized against their rising militancy and the republic itself. In response to the fascist coup, workers formed their own anti-fascist militias, separate from the Republican army. In many Spanish villages people collectively organized agricultural activities and workers' councils controlled towns. Industry was collectivized in Catalonia, and workers exercised democratic control of several public services.

Instead of supporting the actions of the workers, the Stalinist Communist Party argued that the way forward was simply to defend the capitalist republic against fascism. To this end, it opposed the occupations of fields and factories.

For a while, the workers' militias along with the Republican army were able to stop the fascist military offensive. However, fearing the growing power of radical working-class organizations, the Communist-led Republican leadership dismantled and destroyed them. The destruction of the organizations and aspirations of Spain's radical workers and peasants paved the way for Franco's eventual victory.

FROM REFORMS TO REVOLUTION? CHILE 1970-1973

In Chile in 1970 the leftist Popular Unity (PU) alliance won the election and sought to implement wide-ranging radical reforms through parliament. The Chilean ruling class aided by the US sought to crush the PU government.

Segments of the Chilean working class, shantytown dwellers and peasants began to organize themselves in order to defend their gains. The workers' parties in general, and the Communist party in particular, failed to clearly support and stimulate this surge of popular organization from below. The fledgling grassroots workers' organizations had the potential to build and grow into a force that could move towards a revolution.

A number of industries were under workers' control. These sectors began to coordinate between themselves across industries to control the production and distribution of goods. This phenomenon was known as the cordones industrialies (coordination of industries under workers' control).

However, both the Communist and Socialist parties in Chile failed to support the self-organization of the workers because they thought that the existing capitalist state could be used to bring significant and lasting change and that their self-declared vanguard role was jeopardized by workers' self-organization from below.

By the time the Communists decided to support the cordones industriales it was too late. The ruling class had already taken the offensive, culminating in a military coup in 1973 that established the dictatorship of Pinochet.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

In Latin America, new popular uprisings have erupted in the struggle against poverty created by capitalist restructuring. Though right-wing governments in countries such as Bolivia and Argentina have fallen, they have been replaced with different ones and class relations have remained in place. The popular rebellions in these countries have created innovative forms of direct democracy. However, people's power has still yet to be fully realized.

Recent Bolivian and Argentinian struggles have been charac-

terized by a great deal of people's self-organization. In 2000 the Bolivian masses in the city of Cochabamba for a short time actually took control of the city during the fight against the privatization of water. During the economic crisis in Argentina, committees made up of employed and unemployed workers organized to distribute food and services. Manufacturing workers took control of some factories that had been abandoned by their owners.

Though economic and political crisis can lead to insurrections, these capitalist crises by themselves have not been sufficient to secure the victory of the oppressed over the capitalist class.

It is important to note that though economic and political crisis can lead to insurrections, these capitalist crises by themselves have not been sufficient to secure the victory of the oppressed over the capitalist class. A pre-revolutionary situation, like the one that happened in Argentina in 2000 when the ruling class was on the defensive and the state paralyzed, or the one that exists in Bolivia as this article goes to print, can fade without the victory of the revolution. Popular uprisings often turn towards electing new governments to existing states rather than creating and sustaining new forms of democracy, overthrowing the ruling classes from power and taking full control of workplaces and communities.

The conditions of exploitation and oppression have to be matched by the growth of the political consciousness of working people and the oppressed, the growth of their confidence, and an increase in their struggles against capitalist domination.

To achieve a critical level of self-activity amongst the masses the presence of some form of revolutionary workers' organization is needed: an organization that is not only able to learn from the struggle of the masses, but to orient the struggle, to generalize the experiences gained by the masses through the struggle, and to stimulate the self-organization of the people without substituting its initiative and creativity for theirs.

WHICH WAY TO HEAVEN?

This article examined several examples of workers' self-organization. Many others were left out, such as Hungary in 1956, Portugal in 1974 and France in 1968. A complete discussion of these examples is not possible here, nor is it possible to provide more than a cursory examination of the examples raised. In addition, most of the examples were drawn from Europe. Although there are many examples of workers' self-organization around the world, the nature of European colonialism further complicates the terrain. In many developing countries, the struggle against capitalist domination was also a struggle against colonialism in a situation where capitalist social relations were weakly developed. A proper consideration of these struggles can't be adequately undertaken here.

There are some very important lessons to be learned from working peoples' historical struggles for liberation and democracy. These lessons must be fully understood by those who wish to see, and hopefully build towards and perhaps even take part in, successful struggles of this type in the future.

First, working-class people have to create their own democratic structures, created in the process of struggle, and not rely on existing structures to bring change.

Second, at opportune times, such as during periods of capitalist political and economic crisis, these structures should plan toward seizing power and not expect to be able to exist indefinitely side-by-side with existing state structures.

Third, revolutionary socialist organizations play an important role in developing the growth and politics of mass organizations of workers' democracy but are not substitutes for such organizations.

Fourth, the ruling class, when frightened by the prospect of working-class rule, will take barbaric steps to smash working class organizations.

Rosa Luxemburg put it well: "It is stated in the Communist Manifesto that the emancipation of the working class can only be the work of the working class itself and it understands by the working class not a party executive of seven or twelve but the enlightened mass of the proletariat in person. Every step forward in the struggle for emancipation of the working class must at the same time mean a growing intellectual independence of its mass, its growing self-activity, self-determination and initiative." ★

RECOMMENDED READING:

"Their Democracy – and Ours" (editorial) in New Socialist *51 (2005).*

Sebastian Lamb, "The history of revolution and the future of anti-capitalism" in New Socialist *48 (2004).*

Both articles are online at www.newsocialist.org.

100 years of revolutionary folk culture

BY JOSEPH GRIM FEINBERG

In June of this year, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) will celebrate 100 years of existence. It has been a glorious and terrible 100 years. Despite the state-sponsored murder of its bravest members, years of slander and repression, and the shrinking of its membership to a fraction of what it once was, the IWW (also known as the Wobblies) can be considered one of the most effective revolutionary organizations in the history of North America, and one of the most artistic.

As an industrial union that sought to organize all wage labourers into one big union (instead of many exclusive craft unions), the IWW attracted not only industrial workers but migrant labourers, hoboes and the unemployed. After its founding in 1905, the union quickly grew, already rivaling other leading unions in strength by the early 1910s. The IWW reached its peak membership in 1923-24 and it remained a powerful force until the 1930s, when the combined efforts of governments, bosses, other unions and the Communist Party began to take their toll.

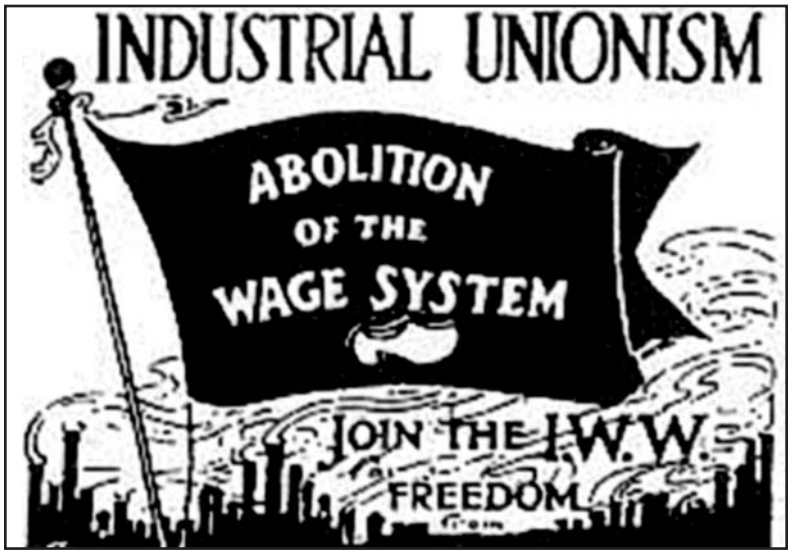
The IWW, however, has left its deepest mark not on economic history, but on revolutionary culture. Its publications are filled with cartoons ridiculing bosses, scabs and politicians. It has produced buttons, stickers, clothing and even bicycle lights with memorable IWW slogans and drawings. The famous late Wobbly artist Carlos Cortez used his woodcuts to spread IWW ideas. Cortez was also a participant in the Chicago surrealist movement, several of whose painters, poets and essayists have lent their talents to the Wobbly cause.

But more than anything else, the IWW is known for its songs. Early on it was called a singing union, and songs written by its members quickly spread throughout the North American working class and beyond. The union's most famous means of spreading its songs has been its Little Red Song Book, possibly the single most influential work of anti-capitalist art in the English-speaking world. Songs of the IWW have become classics, still sung by union members and radicals throughout North America. The songs are full of wit, social theory and romantic dreams. They express the frustrations and pride of the workers, vagabonds and activists who write and sing them. As the subtitle of the song book states, the songs are meant to "fan the flames of discontent" for generations.

The songs of the IWW are important for their content—their ridicule of bosses and the work ethic, their praise of the struggles of the working class. Still more important is the special meaning they acquire as they enter the social life of struggle. These songs arose in the course of struggles, written and sung by those involved. They circulated among the poorest of the North American poor. They were sung in union halls, on picket lines and around the campfires of hobo "jungles." Some songs stuck in the singers' minds; others were forgotten. Some were published in the Little Red Song Book one year and then dropped from the book when the next edition appeared. Other songs remained in the book for decades. Many songs spread far beyond the IWW itself, like Ralph Chaplin's *Solidarity Forever*, often called the hymn of the labour movement; or like *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* (attributed to Harry "Haywire Mac" McClintock), which

Swedish immigrant Joe Hill (1879-1915), joined the IWW in 1910 and became one of its more popular songwriters. In 1914, during bitter struggles over free speech in Utah, Joe Hill was framed on a murder charge and executed on November 19th 1915. Over 30,000 people attended his funeral procession in Chicago and eulogies were read in nine languages.

Joseph Grim Feinberg studies folklore and social movement as a graduate student at the University of Chicago. He is a member of US socialist group Solidarity.



IMAGES: WWW.IWW.ORG

The IWW can be considered one of the most effective revolutionary organizations in the history of North America.

conveys the utopian dreams of a hobo committed to the abolition of work; or like Joe Hill's *The Preacher and the Slave*, whose phrase "You'll get pie in the sky when you die" expresses the bitterness many radicals felt toward reactionary preachers. Joe Hill's life and death have also inspired many newer songs—most notably, Alfred Hayes's *I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night*, but also an almost-epic ballad by Phil Ochs called *Joe Hill*.

As years have gone by, the song lyrics have often changed. New words have been added and subtracted to fit the changing times. The songs of the IWW are folk songs in the best sense of the word. They have been newly created and re-created collectively by each generation of singers; they are active works of democratic, participatory art.

While a handful of IWW songs have spread far and wide, some pearls of Wobbly wisdom have been under-recognized, while some have only recently been brought to popularity by the likes of folksinger Utah Philips. *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum*, whose earlier version was written by Harry McClintock, has been updated in recent years to include clever verses like these:

Oh, why do you work eight hours or more?
There'd be jobs 'nough for two if you'd only work four.
Oh, why speed up work till you're ready to fall?
If you'd only slow down, there'd be work for us all.

Joe Hill's "Last Will" is one of the more beautiful pieces written by an Industrial Worker of the World. Though this was not written as a song, it has become an important piece of Wobbly folklore, written as it was on the eve of the great songwriter's execution and repeated many times since by those who mourn Joe Hill's loss (in spite of his injunction not to mourn for him, but to organize):

My will is easy to decide,
For there is nothing to divide.
My kin don't need to fuss and moan—
"Moss does not cling to a rolling stone."
My body? Ah, if I could choose,
I would to ashes it reduce,
And let the merry breezes blow
My dust to where some flowers grow.
Perhaps some fading flower then
Would come to life and bloom again.
This is my last and final will.
Good luck to all of you,
—Joe Hill.

Many IWW song lyrics might be disappointing to someone who simply reads them in a book. But for people living in their midst, it is different. While singing together with fellow workers, Wobblies could feel that they played a role in the making of the songs; they could feel that the songs arose out of their own activity and expressed the perspective of those around them. It is one thing—a nice thing—to listen to a song; it is another thing to sing a song; and it is yet another thing to sing together with one's comrades. Just as it is one thing to be a free consumer, another thing to be a free individual and yet another thing to act together freely, in struggle for the common good.

Without its songs (if we can imagine such a case), the IWW might still have been a powerful organization of the working class. But it is unlikely that it could have attracted as many members, that the members would have struggled with such confidence and passion, and enjoyed their lives as much as they did in the midst of material misery.

In every epoch and in every revolution, people have made their own art. They have sung about their lives, their hardships and their hopes. There are songs of the American and Mexican Revolutions, of the Spanish Civil War, of the Civil Rights Movement in the US. In the 1960s, revolutionary folk songs sprang up around the world, sometimes spreading among workers and the poor and in most cases spreading through masses of students and youths. In the 1980s, hip hop grew out of the oppression of the North American ghetto and soon spread through poor neighborhoods in the rest of the world—sometimes democratically and sometimes in commercialized form. Meanwhile punk rock, with a healthy disposition toward do-it-yourself culture, bubbled up from the cauldron of white lower-class disgust with the world as it was and remains. And we should not forget the songs of the labour movement in the United States, which have not all come from the Wobblies.

But the IWW has been unique. Relative to the size of its membership, it has contributed disproportionately to the songs that workers sing in the United States. And its songs stand out for their steadfast radicalism and their ironic and vivid style. No other union created a culture so encouraging to radical song-writing and no other union so actively encouraged such songs to be circulated and sung. The Little Red Song Book stands out, in my view, as a masterpiece of world literature. More importantly, the songs represented in the book stand out as masterworks of collective, participatory, revolutionary culture. The songs of the IWW are not great because they sit published in a book, already made. Like all folk songs, they remain great only as long as they are sung. So let's sing. At least a little bit more than we have been doing lately.

May the IWW live another 100 years! And may its songs live on forever—but re-created, always changing, with each new voice that sings. ★

Creating and sustaining communities of struggle

The infrastructure of dissent

BY ALAN SEARS

If you stop and look carefully at the front of the Portuguese Recreational and Cultural Centre on Drouillard Road in Windsor, Ontario, you see the initials ULFTA. Those initials are a reminder of the history of this place. This hall was once the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple, a left-wing cultural and political centre that, among other things, served as a meeting place for people trying to unionize Ford. It was one of many places in this neighbourhood that contributed to the development of the capacity for militancy that helped win the 1945 Ford strike in Windsor. This infrastructure of dissent has now seriously eroded, in Windsor and elsewhere.

The 1945 Ford strike had a lasting impact on collective bargaining in Canada. The company was intent on defeating unionism. It took an all-out mobilization to win that 99-day strike, including a massive blockade of cars, city buses and other vehicles that sealed off the area of the power plant that the company wanted to fire up as winter approached. The active solidarity of the community was crucial. Workers shut down many other plants in sympathy strikes, and many joined Ford workers on the picket line. Strikers were able to sustain themselves in part because of community support, including sympathetic local merchants who advanced them goods. Paul Robeson came to sing at a benefit concert and strikers fanned out across the province to solicit solidarity.

The infrastructure of dissent along Drouillard Road played a crucial role in the mobilization that beat Ford. The infrastructure of dissent is the means of analysis, communication, organization and sustenance that nurture the capacity for collective action. Historically, this infrastructure has often had a geographic centre, like Drouillard Road in Windsor or Winnipeg's North End. These were particular working class areas of industrial communities, often with a very high proportion of recent immigrants. Drouillard Road was a thriving commercial strip catering to the workers at the huge Ford plants in the area. The fortunes of the area began to decline when Ford relocated much of its operation to Oakville in an attempt to flee Windsor's militancy in 1953. Few of the over 100 stores that lined the street are still in operation. Some of the taverns that once hosted thousands of Ford workers at lunch or after work are still in operation, though the atmosphere has changed.

Drouillard Road in the 1930s-1950s provides a valuable example of the richness and diversity of the infrastructure of dissent. Socialist and anarchist political organizations played an important role, particularly the Communist Party and the left of the CCF (predecessor of the NDP). There were also a small number of Anarchists and Trotskyists. Radical publications served as an important source of news and analysis, some aligned with particular political organizations and others non-aligned. Union caucuses developed as unions were organized, providing a forum for challenge and debate within unions, and in many cases producing contested elections. Left-wing ethnic organizations, like the Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple, combined a sense of cultural belonging for vulnerable immigrant workers with a range of community and political activities. Among other things, these halls provided access to critical space for organizing, including union drives. Within and beyond these halls were various shared leisure and cultural activities, ranging from drinking in the bars that lined the street to participation in choirs, plays, dance groups, picnics, sports clubs and parades. All of this led to very important informal networks in neighbourhoods and workplaces, rooted in the shared ups and downs of struggles, in common experiences of joy and pain.

All this created an enormous capacity for collective action. During the 1930s Depression, there were examples of women in the Drouillard Road area banding together to resist the eviction of a neighbour who could not keep up with rent payments. The conduct of the Ford strike was hotly contested within the union, with serious debates about how to fight and whether or not the settlement was adequate. There were also broader debates within the community about the kind of workplace and the kind of society that should emerge from the 1930s depression and World War 2.

A glance back at the richness of the infrastructure of dissent on Drouillard Road at its height provides an important, if rather daunting, perspective on its current weak condition. Contemporary socialist and anarchist political organizations have very little serious weight within the working-class movement, and are too small and marginal to develop a broad perspective on the state of the struggle. I am excluding the NDP here, as it does not tend to act as an organized political force outside of elections.

There are virtually no union caucuses or organized oppositions within the labour movement. Where elections are contested, it is often battles between bureaucratic factions within the leadership and the union machine. The ad hoc groupings that emerge to challenge sell-outs and bad decisions often do not survive to fight the next battle. The spread of the automobile, suburbanization and the growth of cities mean that people now rarely share a neighbourhood with co-workers. The development of home-oriented and individualized leisure activities (television, computer games, personal listening devices) have diminished the spaces for shared activity, whether it is listening to live music or gathering for a drink. Overwork, in the home and for pay, crowds everyone's schedule.

The infrastructure of dissent on Drouillard Road developed a community of activists, with many who could think their own way through strategic and tacti-

Alan Sears teaches at the University of Windsor. and is a supporter of the New Socialist Group.

Auto blockade during the Windsor Ford strike in November 1945.

cal questions, and take initiative to pursue struggles and organize effectively. An important layer of individuals in these areas were worker intellectuals, thinkers whose development came not through formal education, but from the debates, discussions and educational activities tied to activism. This infrastructure provided the means to sustain memories, learn lessons and take action.

It is difficult to sustain our collective memories of struggles in the absence of a developed infrastructure of dissent. There are brilliant murals on Drouillard Road painted since 1999 by Mark Williams and other artists commissioned to represent some of this history. But the real challenge is to maintain these memories as a living legacy of discussion and debate as we try to rebuild this infrastructure through engagement in new struggles.

The weakness of the infrastructure of dissent at the present time is demonstrated by the vulnerability to bureaucratic sell-outs of even the most promising mass struggles. Even brilliant mobilizations like the strike of British Columbia hospital workers early in May 2004 or the two-week Ontario teachers' strike in 1997 can be shut down by union leaders with virtually no space for opposition or debate and only the most limited forums for learning the lessons and planning for next time.

The infrastructure of dissent will have to be rebuilt as new struggles emerge. This is not to romanticize the old infrastructure of dissent. The Communist Party, for example, often used its leading role in this infrastructure to close down discussion and debate, as when Windsor Stalinists tried to shut down the meeting where Emma Goldman presented her pro-anarchist report from Spain at the Polish Hall in 1938. Also, the infrastructure was built for men, so that women's voices and needs were often marginalized or excluded. Indeed, the unpaid and largely unrecognized labour of women in the household doing domestic work was often the prerequisite for the development of these political and social spaces. And racist exclusion along various lines was frequently an unspoken assumption.

A new infrastructure of dissent cannot be rebuilt along the old lines. There have been important changes in the form of the city and in the way we live our daily lives. Unions have become more bureaucratic, and employers have restructured workplaces to reduce or eliminate the role of shop stewards who have traditionally been an important component of union caucuses and oppositional capacities within the labour movement.

Nor do we want to go back. We have learned (and must continue to learn) important things along the way, particularly through the anti-racist, feminist, lesbian/gay/queer, anti-war, Aboriginal and Québécois independist movements that burgeoned during and after the 1960s. The demands we place on the infrastructure of dissent are very different now. We need to develop forms of solidarity at the highest level, built genuinely around the needs and experiences of the most disadvantaged.

We see glimpses now of some of the elements that will help weave together the next infrastructure of dissent. The internet offers incredible communication capacities for the transmission of ideas and for organizing. Social movements create spaces for activism, often with very creative forms of education and mobilization. But we still have a lot to learn about the way a fuller infrastructure might develop.

There are important things we can learn from the kind of infrastructure of dissent that developed on Drouillard Road, even if our goal is neither museum-like preservation nor reconstruction along the same lines. The importance of the infrastructure of dissent is that it is built on longer-term relationships. Movements rise and fall. Workplaces move from resignation to mobilization. Political moods shift. But the kinds of formal and informal networks that operated on Drouillard Road cemented longer-term relationships that developed collective capacities to act as a class. This means negotiating the difficult balance between the invigoration from participation in dynamic, militant movements and the commitment to the long haul. We should be orienting to mass mobilizations, building lasting networks and developing a collective memory that is not limited to the interpretation of a single political tendency.

In the end, the infrastructure of dissent is the expression of a broader left. As such, it benefits from pluralism and democratic decision-making. The nature of working class existence is that struggles will be uneven. Some are ready for militant mobilization while others are more cautious or even hostile. There is variation within and between workplaces, from sector to sector of the economy, between employed and not employed. Experiences of oppression provide different perspectives on the struggle of the moment. The capacity for effective solidarity depends on the ability to get a broader picture and take decisions in the light of varied experiences and levels of confidence.

At its best, the infrastructure of dissent develops capacities for independent analysis and initiative. An effective activist needs to understand the immediate circumstances in the light of a broader perspective, and contribute to suitable forms of mobilization. It takes important collective work to develop independent thinking and creative activism. The rich capacities of the Drouillard Road community remind us of the possibilities and the challenges. ★

What Is Ultra-Leftism?

BY ALEX LEVANT

Lenin speaks at a meeting to mark the opening of the Second Congress of the Comintern.

Those who attempt to navigate the fractured landscape of the far left at one point or another encounter the term "ultra-leftism."

In broad strokes, ultra-leftism is an approach to radical politics that doesn't see the need for revolutionaries to immerse themselves in struggles that are not already revolutionary. Ultra-leftism fails to orient to the day-to-day concerns of people and recognize the need to connect with them as they are. It expresses a frustration with the apparent passivity of working people. It tends to see them as brainwashed, sleeping, duped, bought out, and so in need of being woken up, confronted, or even side-stepped altogether. In practice, ultra-leftism does not view the oppressed as those who must emancipate themselves by developing their capacities, consciousness and unity in the process of struggle.

When the term originated in the 1920s, it was a useful concept. Today, it has lost much of its explanatory power. It is often used to dismiss any activist who uses non-sanctioned tactics, or anyone who seems more militant than the critic using the term. In response, activists who have been critiqued for being "ultra-leftist" have not only resisted the label, but have largely rejected the concept altogether.

However, the problem originally called ultra-leftism—failure to engage with the working masses in a way that develops their self-activity—has not disappeared. Rather, it has become more severe than ever before, affecting not only today's ultra-leftists, but also some of their most vociferous critics. To understand the problem today, we need to creatively reconsider the concept of ultra-leftism in light of our current context.

ORIGIN OF ULTRA-LEFTISM

While the problem of ultra-leftism existed in the 1800s in various forms, the concept was developed in the 1920s in a specific historical moment defined by two pivotal events: the collapse of the Second International (1914) and the Russian Revolution led by the Bolsheviks (1917).

The Second International was a loose federation of socialist political parties and trade unions. It was founded in 1889 and collapsed at the beginning of World War I when its leading parties broke international solidarity to support the war efforts of their respective states. The Third International (also known as the Communist International or Comintern) was founded by the victorious Bolsheviks in 1919.

The Bolsheviks sought to organize the Third International in a way that would avoid the reformist and collaborationist tendencies that plagued the Second International. It was to be a more cohesive body that was fervently internationalist and revolutionary.

The Second Congress of the Comintern (1920) included a long, open debate on the relationship of revolutionary organizations to the working class, involving representatives of almost all currents on the international far left. Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin's (1870-1924) famous pamphlet on *Left-wing Communism*, which argues that the Bolshevik victory wasn't only a result of its revolutionary politics and organizational independence from reformist parties but also its deep immersion in the actual struggles and organizations of working people, was written specifically for this Congress and was distributed to all delegates. His target audience was radicals who shared his disdain for reformism, but didn't share his conclusions about the success of the Bolsheviks.

Alex Levant is a self-hating ultra-leftist and an editorial associate of New Socialist.

It was necessary to make these arguments because a current had developed in the Comintern that didn't recognize the need to root their organizations in the struggles of broad layers of workers. In their fervour to guard against reformism, these ultra-leftists refused to participate in non-revolutionary organizations—even ones that included millions of workers, such as the mainstream labour movement.

In contrast, Lenin argued that revolutionaries must engage with peoples' struggles and organizations as they are, and advance their views in the context of these struggles rather than preach the revolutionary gospel from afar or lead by example. This is why Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the famous political theorist and leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) from 1924-26, criticized his own party during its ultra-leftist phase for being "suspended in the air" and acting like "unappreciated geniuses."

This kind of critique was perhaps best expressed at the Congress by Paul Levi (1883-1930), co-founder of the German Communist Party and close friend of the Polish-German Marxist Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919): "Just as the kernel withers without the shell, so to the Party must wither and become a sect if it neglects to find ways by which it can penetrate into the life of the revolutionary masses… The main question for us is how we find the way to the masses, and I am of the opinion that we must try all the ways that lead to the masses. These are the trades unions, workers' councils… the parliamentary battlefield and even non-party organizations."

From this perspective, the task of any type of revolutionary organization guided by the principles of socialism-from-below is to facilitate the transformation of the working class through its own struggles. That's why Luxemburg argued for fighting for reforms in a way that develops the capacities, consciousness and unity of the working class—and why Levi insisted that we find our way to the masses by any means possible. This doesn't mean socialists taking power on behalf of workers, or leading people like a shepherd leads a flock of sheep. It means contributing to building a movement that develops working peoples' capacities to effectively take on the bosses themselves, as a class.

THEN AND NOW

But revitalizing the concept of ultra-leftism isn't simply a matter of brushing the dust off Lenin's *Left-wing Communism*, although that's a good place to start. We must also account for the similarities and differences between the era of the Russian Revolution and the moment in which we live.

The question posed by Levi—how to find our way to the masses—remains the dominant challenge for the far left today. However, the answers he offers, including how to structure our revolutionary organizations and how to connect with the working masses, do not address our realities.

Although there are similarities between the two periods, there are also crucial differences. For instance, the concept of ultra-leftism originated at a time of mass workers' parties, trade unions, as well as councils of workers, peasants and even soldiers. These organizations varied widely in their politics, but many of them had mass support among working people.

The greatest barrier between the far left and the working masses is not our irreverence toward "peace, order and good government," but our irrelevance to their actual lives.

Today things are significantly different. First, there are no mass workers' parties or workers' councils in Canada. We don't have peasants. Soldiers' councils are beyond the horizon of possibilities today. We have trade unions, but they differ considerably from the unions referred to in the original debates on ultra-leftism. The second key difference is the Canadian working class itself, as we shall see below.

POLITICAL DESKILLING / RE-SKILLING

Over 80 years have passed since the concept of ultra-leftism made its appearance. The slogan of the Third Congress of the Comintern (1921), "To the masses!" referred to very different masses than we have in Canada today. The working class today has been deeply affected by a process of deskilling that has many dimensions.

When researchers talk about the "deskilling" of the working class, they usually mean the fragmentation of work into simple tasks that can be done by less-skilled, lower-paid workers. What tends to get overlooked is the deskilling of the working class in a deeper sense: a political deskilling. This involves the damaging of our capacities for self-activity; that is, our ability to manage our own workplaces, our society and our lives in general.

In capitalist society, we are trained to follow orders rather than take creative initiative, to watch rather than do, to compete rather than cooperate, to dominate rather than coexist and to possess rather than share. More than that, capitalism presents us with a nightmare world and offers us commodities as an escape, commodities that keep us in a dream-like state (as a class, not as individuals), frustrating our collective awakening.

This process of deskilling has created a situation where people are not simply brainwashed by propaganda (an elitist view), but are trained by our own daily experience of life under capitalism to submit to the rule of the bosses.

While political deskilling is an integral feature of capitalist society, it has tremendously intensified and deepened since the era of the Russian Revolution. The countervailing process of reskilling has significantly waned. Finding our way to the masses must involve grasping the process of deskilling and crafting strategies for reskilling.

What does this mean? Above all, the actions and methods of radicals must create opportunities for people to explore their creativity, to work collectively through their many differences,

to experience the effects of their own actions. People must be able to participate in a meaningful way in the organizations and actions of the left.

UNIONS

Unions are key organizations for workers' political reskilling. In the 1920s, a typical expression of ultra-leftism was a confrontational or dismissive attitude toward unions. As we saw earlier, ultra-leftists abstained from participating in mainstream unions, while their critics argued for participating in these mass workers' organizations (despite their limited objectives) and advancing radical perspectives while doing so.

While the general thrust of this argument remains correct, the union movement in Canada today considerably differs from the one referred to in those debates. Unions in Canada won legal concessions and assumed a legal identity in the so-called "postwar compromise" of the mid-1940s. These concessions forced the capitalist class to negotiate with unions and ensured unions' financial security by guaranteeing automatic dues payments from all workers covered by union contracts.

But this victory came at a price. It fundamentally transformed the way unions function. Everything from how to organize a union to when to go on strike to how to resolve disputes with the bosses became governed by legal procedures. As a result, union leaders no longer have to inspire and mobilize workers to settle disputes with employers, but focus almost exclusively on navigating the legalese of labour relations. In a sense, unions found their way to the masses through state legislation.

As a result, the union movement has experienced a bifurcation: on one side are the majority of workers who are profoundly deskilled and increasingly removed from the arena of struggle, on the other is a vast bureaucracy of elected officials and hired staff who represent the interests of these workers within these new rules of struggle and work to ensure that the workers obey these rules.

Furthermore, over the last three decades this postwar compromise has become increasingly one-sided. The ruling class has clawed back many of the gains won by workers in the aftermath of WWII, as seen in the considerable drop in living standards since the mid-1970s. Union officials, for their part, have (with some exceptions) continued to hold up their end of the deal, playing by the old rules and policing members to do the same.

Ultra-leftism fails to orient to the day-to-day concerns of people and to recognize the need to connect with them as they are.

Thus, unions became organizations not only of reskilling, but also of deskilling. Consequently, when we engage with trade unions today, the question we must ask at all times is: What is the relationship between the union and the working class? How does the union contribute to deskilling/reskilling?

The Canadian union movement today is considerably limited by its current form; nevertheless, abstaining from unions is still "ultra-leftist." We must engage with unions, participating in union battles with the bosses, as well as internal struggles for union reform. However, we must keep in mind that we are not simply engaging with working people, but with institutions that are considerably disconnected from working people and have a complex relationship with them. We need to be involved in unions in a way that's guided by an understanding of their history, the condition of the working class today and the predicament of the far left.

ULTRA-LEFTISM YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Discussions of ultra-leftism today often imply that we live in the same conditions as the 1920s and that leftists are faced with the choice of either turning to the masses or turning away from them like ultra-leftists. But, as we have seen, those alternatives are not so clear cut given the state of unions, the political deskilling of the working class and the absence of a mass movement to turn to. Indeed, some of the loudest critics of today's ultra-leftists have themselves been profoundly unsuccessful at rooting their organizations among the masses.

In the 1920s, isolation from the majority of people was often a tactical decision. Today, it is the condition of the radical left as a whole. In the current period, our isolation from the majority of people is not only a result of ultra-left tactics. The fact that various groups and activists on the far left are not rooted in the mass organizations and struggles of the working class is not only because of a politics that dismisses the need to participate in them, but also with the fact that such mass organizations and struggles largely don't exist today. In today's context, it is very difficult not to be ultra-leftist.

Some activists have sought to resolve this problem by staging actions that appeal to the broadest layer of people. For instance, the mainstream anti-war organizations have sought to address the perceived low level of militancy among most Canadians by staging tame street demonstrations. To the organizers' credit, these demonstrations successfully mobilized many tens of thousands across English Canada (even more in Québec) and contributed to the pressure that kept Canada out of the "Coalition of the Willing." But what have these demonstrations done to build a movement that develops working peoples' capacities to change society?

While this is difficult to gauge, it is telling that despite the ongoing war in Iraq, the anti-war movement has all but disappeared, none of the groups on the far left (including those centrally involved in organizing these demonstrations) have grown at all, no new "spontaneous" formations have arisen and there has been no effect on electoral politics or beyond. The mainstream anti-war organizations that so carefully positioned themselves at the lead of the movement now find themselves leading no one but their miniscule memberships.

Rosa Luxemburg speaks at the Socialist Congress of 1907. She spent most of World War I in prison and was released on November 9, 1918. Two months later, on January 15, 1919 she was murdered.

The question is: why?

While on the surface the approach of the mainstream anti-war organizations appeared to overcome the isolation of the left—after all, many thousands of people did come out to the demonstrations—it is essentially a dead-end. The anti-war marches successfully mobilized large numbers of people, but they did not seek to address the deskilling processes that frustrate the emergence of a militant mass movement. Rather, the way they were organized mirrored the same top-down decision-making processes that deskill us in everyday life under capitalism.

In some places, organizing meetings were considerably stage-managed, with key decisions made elsewhere. In many cities, there were few ways for people to become actively involved in the movement in between the big demonstrations. As a result, broader layers of people were not able to participate in any meaningful decision-making. While demonstrations were conceived to include increasing numbers of people, their participation was generally limited to marching. As a result, the movement did not diversify and escalate. Instead, it was limited to repeated marches, which became stagnant and dull, and eventually stopped being attractive to the thousands who had once participated.

My point is not only that the left needs to be more democratic, but that we must connect with people in different ways. Rather than organizing demonstrations in a way that appeals to the maximum number of people, our efforts must be oriented on reskilling the working class. Certainly, we must begin with people as they are, but the point isn't to accommodate the least militant people as they are. Nor is it to simply celebrate militancy. The goal must be to raise collective capacities to the point of militancy. Engaging with people as they are must mean grasping the processes that have made us the way we are, so as to address the obstacles blocking the emergence of a mass anti-capitalist movement.

CONCLUSIONS

Originally, the concept of ultra-leftism was used to argue that a revolutionary organization must be politically and organizationally independent from, but deeply rooted in, mass struggles and organizations (however limited their objectives). However, one of the distinguishing features of our current moment is the virtual absence of such organizations and struggles. These differences call for a reconsideration of what it means to be ultra-leftist in the current period.

If not being ultra-leftist in the early 1920s meant participating in mass workers' organizations and joining the struggles of the day, however non-revolutionary those struggles may have been, what does it mean not to be ultra-leftist in a period like today in Canada where such organizations largely do not exist, and where mass struggles have a radically different character?

Those of us on the far left who recognize the need to find our way to the masses must confront the following the question: why has our knowledge of the concept of ultra-leftism not helped us connect with even a significant minority of working people?

None of our organizations have come up with solutions to this problem. Recognizing the need to connect with the working masses is certainly vital, but the point is to actually do it. Pretending that the essential features of the current moment are the same as those of the 1920s and mimicking the tactics of the early Comintern has not led anyone out of this malaise.

Failure to find our way to the masses makes our organizations into sects. In addition to engaging with existing mass organizations and struggles, we must think through and address the processes that have made unions bureaucratic and mass struggles rare, which I have sought to grasp using the concept of deskilling/reskilling. Our understanding of these processes must inform our organizing work.

From a deskilling/reskilling perspective, we must strive toward genuine inclusivity and democracy in the actions that we stage and in our organizing methods. This means always being oriented beyond the far left—not by putting on a show of respectability, but by striving to resonate with peoples' actual concerns and demonstrating a capacity to address them. The greatest barrier between the far left and the working masses is not our irreverence toward "peace, order and good government," but our irrelevance to their actual lives. ★

BOOK REVIEW

A creative exploration of social and political issues

YOUR SECRETS SLEEP WITH ME

BY DARREN O'DONNELL

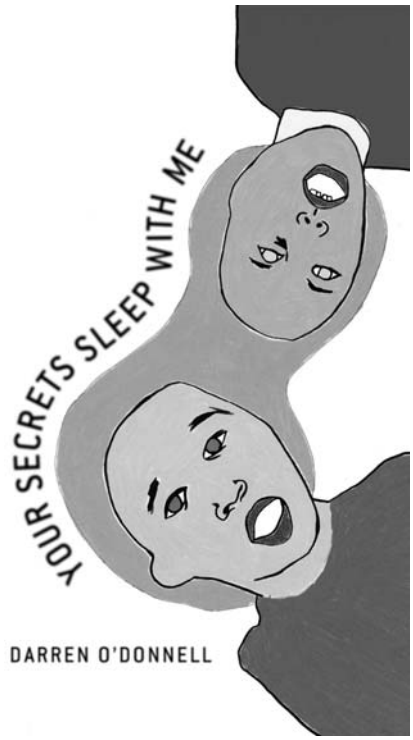
PUBLISHED BY
COACH HOUSE BOOKS
PRICE: $18.95

REVIEWED BY ALISON FISHER

Your Secrets Sleep with Me is the first book written by Darren O'Donnell, an acclaimed Toronto creative director and playwright, who has produced such plays as *A Suicide Site Guide to the City* and *pppeeeaaaccceee*. O'Donnell was the recipient of a Dora Award for *White Mice*, a play produced in 1998 and described as "a cartoon-like expose of the virulent racism at the core of Canada."

Both in form and content, this novel is a creative, playful and meandering exploration of philosophical, social, political and spiritual issues of the day. The novel's unusual literary form requires a reader willing to let go of any particular expectations she may have in relation to conventional plot progression, character development or even her own relationship to the text. O'Donnell uses his characters and the text to advance a whole host of ideas on a variety of topics, including sexuality among children and young adults, state surveillance in the age of 'the war on terror', and racism and migration in the context of contemporary capitalist North America.

Much of the novel centers around the dialogues and conversations of five primary characters all living in Toronto and ranging in age from eight to sixteen. As these children's lives unfold alongside and through one another, a state of emergency has been declared in the United States, various diseases run rampant within the city's



population, thousands of people are attempting to migrate to Canada from the Unites States and the CN Tower has fallen into Lake Ontario. Two of the five primary characters have recently migrated from the US to Canada to escape the repressive realities of living under a state of emergency.

The cast of primary characters includes Michael and Ruth Racco, whose father is arrested at the beginning of the book for a fit of road rage involving a backhoe on the Queen Elizabeth Way. Michael is eleven and deathly allergic to peanut butter. Ruth is sixteen and has a rare skin disorder that inhibits the production of melanin, making her ghastly white in appearance. James Hardcastle is a thirteen-year-old boy whose conception was the result of his mother's manipulation of her own ovum. As a result of his rather unconventional conception, he possesses certain supernatural qualities such as the ability to walk on water or to bring formerly dead dogs to life. He lives in a group home, where the state decided to put him after condemning his mother for her genetic manipulation experiments.

We are also introduced to eight-year-old Rani Vishnu, the youngest character in the book. Rani is part of the mass exodus of Americans to Canada following the Red Alert declared by the President of the United States. She and her mother become refugees and are forced to live with hundreds of others in an abandoned warehouse until Canadian officials can decide their fate. Rani is becoming prematurely grey at the age of eight. Finally, there is sixteen-year-old Kaliope Vally who is also a recent immigrant to Canada. She moved several weeks before the mass exodus and is searching for her activist-poet-intellectual aunt Amina, also rumoured to have escaped to Canada. Kaliope is often gripped with bouts of nausea, which occur as a result of the injustice and oppression that she sees and experiences around her.

The characters in this novel demonstrate the degree to which our bodies are given meanings which are beyond our control but nevertheless provide grounds for how others respond to us and how we respond to the world in which we live. Additionally, the social and political world that envelops us affects not only how we function emotionally but also physically and spiritually. Such interrelationships are evident in 8-year-old Rani's grey hairs, Kaliope's nausea, Ruth's skin disorder and James's supernatural abilities.

O'Donnell also uses his characters to explore the issue of child/teen sexuality and to play with traditional notions of childhood, teenage and adult experiences. On the first page of the book, O'Donnell asks the reader to play with their ideas of childhood too: "Try to imagine what that might be like. It's not like you've gotten where you are without having been one. If you have a second, make a list of all the things you've learned since then. Or forgotten since then. Which would be the bigger list?"

Throughout the novel, O'Donnell

Alison Fisher has an MA in Sociology from York University and is currently a member of the Toronto 'Don' t Ask, Don't Tell campaign.'

continually repeats the ages of the characters over and over. These reminders, although annoyingly repetitive, are frequently necessary since his characters do not use the language of children. However, like children, the characters are open to various experiences and often engage in impulsive behaviour or odd experiments. In one particularly memorable moment of the book, Rani and Michael have a conversation about their mutual experiences of revulsion to the sight and smell of someone else's bodily excretions. They debate why this might be, given that they don't feel the same revulsion to their own smell. Both wonder if this revulsion is precipitated by a terror of intimacy. In order to test their theory, the decide to blindfold one another and exchange samples of each other's shit in order to measure their reactions to the experience.

Sex and sexuality are also an important part of the novel. Desire in this book is fluid, knowing no gender or age boundaries. James experiences attraction to other boys, Kaliope and Ruth form an intimate relationship with one another and eight year old Rani and eleven year old Michael experiment with sex as well. James also expresses desire for Michael's mother and eventually the two become intimate. Later on in the book, it is also revealed that James Hardcastle has both male and female genitalia.

This novel does not have a plot line in the traditional sense nor are characters developed in the conventional manner of most mainstream fiction. Instead the reader moves from conversation to conversation between characters, who discuss anything from the methods of suicide to the methods of capitalism. Very little time is spent with any one character and while we are given brief outlines (their age, physical description, any odd traits or 'conditions'), the particular personality of each character or their historical development over time remains a mystery. O'Donnell provides this character outline of each of the primary characters in the first fifty pages of the book and moves on.

The form of the novel is clearly guided by principles of playful interaction. The reader is regularly subjected to the contradictory reflections and philosophical musings of the third person narrator who tells the story of the characters and their activities. To describe the narration in this novel as 'third person' is perhaps a bit misleading given that the narrator identifies itself not as human at certain points in the story. At other moments, the narrator refers to itself as 'we' and asks the reader to interpret the narrator very literally as the particular words and ideas on the page.

In addition to playing with the third person narrative style, O'Donnell also attempts to transgress the passive relationship that traditionally exists between the reader and the novel he or she is reading. Instead, O'Donnell asks the reader to actively participate in the ideas that are being developed. Throughout the book, the reader is given numerous directives or activity suggestions. For example, the reader is asked to close the book and shout 'hello' to herself in her head, to kiss the book, to pay attention to her feelings as she reads particular words on the page. Rather than being transported to another reality as a passive reader, you are instead asked to immediately and directly interact with the ideas of the novel and even the characters themselves. This even involves answering a call by one of the characters on your cell phone! In this way, O'Donnell not only asks the reader to be an active participant in the story but he also plays with the reader's traditional understanding of her relationship with fictional narrative and time.

With no plot or character development in sight, it remained a personal challenge for me to finish this book. When I read fiction, I want to become engrossed in the particular plot lines and characters of a story. When these remained decidedly absent, I had a difficult time remaining attentive to the dialogues and found myself annoyed by the abrupt movement from one idea or conversation to another and constant requests to do this or that. It felt a bit like being forced to watch television with someone who continually flips from channel to channel, while periodically demanding that I make him or her a sandwich or stand on my head.

While frustrated and, at times, quite bored with the text, I was still able to appreciate the inventive and creative quality of the novel. This book is not escapist in any sense. It is real, it is now and you are decidedly present in it. It is intellectually rigorous, sometimes shocking and frequently demanding of the reader. It is both heavy and light in content. The ideas in the book are provocative and remain with you long after you have put the book down. This novel is best suited for the politically and intellectually astute reader who enjoys creative and experimental literature. ★

BOOK REVIEW

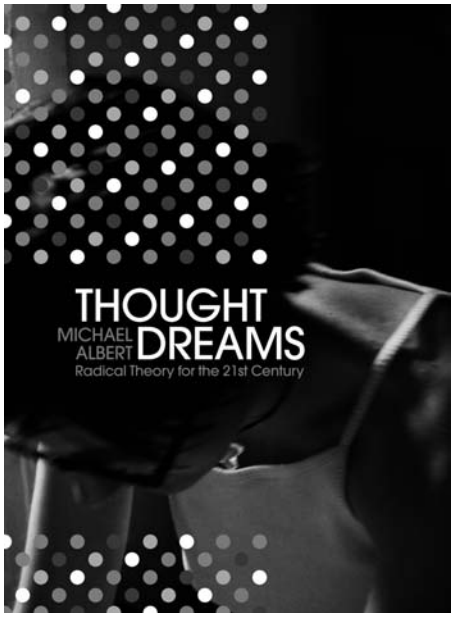
The theory we need?

THOUGHT DREAMS: RADICAL THEORY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

BY MICHAEL ALBERT

PUBLISHED 2004, $24.00 CDN
ARBEITER RING, WINNIPEG

REVIEWED BY SEBASTIAN LAMB



We live in a society where "common sense" says that most people should not bother with "big ideas." "Seek entertainment, not understanding" and "leave the thinking to the smart people" are two of the messages working people and their children pick up at home, in school and on the job.

Even on the Left, there is little attention to "big ideas." For example, serious popular education is simply not on the priority list for the people who run the biggest force on the Left in Canada, the New Democratic Party (NDP). The reason is simple: if your goal is simply to get more people to vote for your party so it can administer capitalism instead of the Liberals or Tories, why do you need to explain how society works and how it can be changed?

Similarly, this kind of theory is almost never taught in the education courses offered to union members. Most labour education today is designed to teach the skills needed to keep bureaucratic unions running, from how to negotiate collective agreements to how to handle grievances. Union activists need these skills, it's true. But most union courses teach skills in a narrow way (not as skills for troublemakers with a working-class perspective on society), and labour education should be about much more than skills.

In parts of the radical Left there's a different kind of hostility to theory. Some activists spurn "big ideas" because they seem irrelevant to the urgent needs of people living in poverty, facing deportation or living under occupation.

Hostility to theory can have other sources too, like people's encounters with rigid dogma and theory shaped only by the experiences of white men. In our society most Left-wing theory is developed and learned in universities, where it's detached from struggles for change and trapped in academic jargon.

WHY WE NEED THEORY

But neglecting theory is a mistake, whatever the reason. People who want deep changes in society need theory. As Michael Albert puts it in *Thought Dreams*, "as radicals, we want a theory that explains social events and trends sufficiently for us to situate ourselves, explain to others, and understand the way things are. We want a theory to predict phenomena, and give us a notion of what's coming. Finally, we want a theory to help seek outcomes we desire."

A prolific writer and veteran organizer in the US, Albert is one of the best-known thinkers associated with the website zmag.org and the print magazine *Z*. He has energetically popularized the theory of participatory economics ("parecon") and sought to communicate his ideas about strategy and movement-building.

In *Thought Dreams*, Albert offers a clear introduction to the theory of society he and his co-thinkers have developed (originally dubbed "complementary holism," Albert now rejects that name as pretentious). The book takes the form of lectures sprinkled with conversation with students.

Albert proposes that the centre of society is all people, with their abilities and ideas. All societies are made up of four spheres: economy, polity, kinship and culture. The spheres are made up of institutions, which are "roles and the relations among the roles that people slot into."

Each sphere is defined by a function that Albert claims is found in every society because of the nature of the human species itself. Economy is defined by the production of goods and services. Polity is defined by political coordination. Kinship arises from sex, gender, procreation and socialization. Culture/community is defined by identity.

The choices available to people in a society (what Albert calls a society's "institutional boundary") are determined by how the four spheres are shaped in that society. To understand a society, we need to analyse how the four spheres are organized in it. The spheres may co-define each other,

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Sebastian Lamb is an editor of New Socialist.

and help each other reproduce the current order of things. For example, male-dominated families reinforce workplaces in which workers are subordinate to managers and vice-versa. A polity in which citizens defer to politicians reinforces subordination in the workplace and the family and vice versa.

In this theory, revolution is "a change in the defining characteristics of a sphere of social life."

A revolution may redefine one sphere and affect the others without revolutionizing them. In such a case, the revolutionary change will usually be reversed by the way the other spheres are organized.

In Albert's view, revolutionary theory should draw on feminism to understand and change kinship, radical nationalism to understand and change culture/community, and anarchism for polity because these perspectives each tackle one sphere "from the perspective of a most oppressed group." For economy, Albert advocates the "parecon" perspective rather than Marxism because he sees Marxism as a critique of capitalism from the perspective of the "coordinator class," people between labour and capital "who monopolize knowledge, information and access to levers of power."

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Albert's effort to write theory to understand society and guide struggles for revolutionary change in a clear and accessible way is commendable. The theory in *Thought Dreams* has some real strengths: it tries to deal with all dimensions of society together and its aim is liberation from all forms of oppression. However, there are some real problems with this theory.

One is the idea that all societies across history are composed of four institutional spheres that interact with each other. This is less helpful than thinking in terms of a range of social relations between groups of people—such as class, gender and race—that always exist in and through each other.

Institutions certainly exist, but they arise from (and, in turn, help shape) social relations. For example, the corporation is a legally-recognized institution through which capitalists organize the production of commodities, competition with each other and the exploitation of workers. But the social relation between capital and labour can exist without the institution of the corporation. It's this exploitative social relation that needs to be abolished.

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Albert's idea of a "community" sphere that exists throughout human history is particularly weak. This is his way of trying to deal with racism, nationalism and religion. But racism, nationalism and religion are not different versions of the same thing. Albert's argument that these phenomena are all related to a supposed human need for "identity" that exists across all societies is also dubious. Moreover, treating racism, nationalism and religion in this way doesn't help us to understand any of them or to fight racial, national or religious oppression.

Another problem in the theory lies in the idea that separate economic and political spheres exist in all human societies. In fact, this separation only happened as capitalism developed in Western Europe. In class-divided societies before capitalism, rulers were simultaneously the governors and the exploiters of those who toiled. Capitalism separated the control of production (monopolized by capitalists)—"economics"—from "politics." That's why workers could and did win political rights without upsetting capitalist control of production.

In addition, when it comes to explaining how societies undergo profound changes in the way they are structured, Albert's theory doesn't give priority to any aspect of society. I would argue that he is wrong to reject Karl Marx's insight that humans can't live without access to the material means of life, and therefore the social relations of production and class that organize our access to the means of life ultimately have more impact on how societies evolve than, say, religion or military might.

Perhaps this is why Albert doesn't convey the extraordinary impact that capitalism has had on all dimensions of human society. Capitalism has transformed the ways in which people live in intimate relationships, raise children, relate to each other and other species, and understand themselves, other people, society and nature (Albert would probably agree).

Finally, Albert has a double standard when it comes to other theories. Feminism, radical nationalism and anarchism are seen as perspectives of oppressed groups on a particular sphere of society, while Marxism is not. This is odd, since I think Albert would recognize that certain kinds of feminism, nationalism and anarchism have been the perspectives of middle-class elites, and not very liberating for most of the people whose oppression they are supposed to challenge.

In my view, some forms of "Marxism" have been the perspectives of ruling classes or would-be rulers: for example, the state ideologies of the USSR, China and Cuba. Others have been a mix of working-class perspectives and ideas that really are capitalist in origin. Then there are forms of Marxism, whose perspective is working-class, some of which have tried to integrate the perspectives of women, people of colour, queers and other oppressed groups. It's this kind of anti-racist feminist Marxism that many of us at *New Socialist* seek to develop.

So Albert's claim that Marxism is at its core a non-working-class theory is unconvincing. It also encourages readers to ignore Marx and the best Marxists in favour of Michael Albert.

What's more, the idea of a distinct coordinator class is, I would argue, a flawed way of dealing with real issues: the division of labour in capitalist societies gives some workers much more knowledge and intellectual skills than others, and includes hired managers.

Thought Dreams doesn't give us the revolutionary theory we need. But it throws down a challenge: to develop and popularize better theory just as vigorously as Albert. ★

Urban legends ... girl pirates ...

"Wait til you hear what happened to my friend's cousin..."

With these words, or ones awfully similar, we're drawn into that strange mixture of gossip, folk wisdom and fairy tale that people use to make sense of the world and that folklorists call Urban Legends. *Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid* is a new collection of scary urban legends, selected and commented on by Jan Harold Brunvand. Haunting these pages are murderers in closets and under cars, malicious babysitters, 9/11 related numerology and killer insects.

Brunvand (www.janbrunvand.com) has been collecting these stories for decades and has published several collections of them. Some act more as compendiums, with others being more academic analyses. The compendiums are more successful, and the now retired Brunvand sticks to this format while providing interesting contexts for the stories. Many are shown to have been repeated with some cosmetic changes of locale and date through newspapers, letters, interviews and emails. Brunvand is quite good at showing how gendered many of these stories are. Many Urban Legends are tales of young women in danger from strange men who are rescued by "normal" men—police and gas station attendants—or, more recently, by cell phone technology. Most of these stories suggest the main threats to women are serial killers. A dimension that Brunvand has little opportunity to touch on, is the racialization of the various menaces. In one story, as recorded by a folklorist, the interviewee had to be coaxed to say that a crime story was about black men. Bizarre post 9/11 anti-Semitic stories are avoided as well. This collection is entertaining, and its disclosure of sources may dispel some common prejudices.

The first issue of *Violet Miranda, Girl Pirate* (www.kissmachine.org/violet) by writer Emily Pohl-Weary and illustrator Willow Dawson was recently released and the second issue should be available as you read this column. Violet and her friend Elsa are bored senseless on a small island, until they're kidnapped by pirates. This first of four issues establishes the characters and a feel for the story. Pohl-Weary's sharp dialogue reflects her abilities as a writer and thoughtful collaborator and editor. Several pages are wordless, and Dawson displays terrific graphic story-telling ability and a unique drawing style. Many of the illustrations recall classic adventure and superhero comics as well as the Victorian decadent, Aubrey Beardsley. The comic should be available in better book stores or via mailorder online.

Two recent artworks—one a film, the other a poem—tell intensely personal stories very thoughtfully and imaginatively. Both seem too much or too subtle for this writer to comment on intelligently. Instead I'd encourage readers to examine them on their own.

The Woodsman, written and directed by Nicole Kassell and starring Kevin Bacon, tells the story of a recently released child molester. Where does he go? What does he do? What did he do? Who can he talk to? The film is visually stunning, and Bacon gives an astounding performance. I would urge caution in how people watch this film. It is unsensational, but its subject matter and the moral ambiguities it rests on are upsetting.

Masque (Mercury, 2004—see www.themercurypress.ca), by Rachel Zolf, is a book length poem about the tensions between the public appearance and the private experience of family, Jewishness, lesbian identity and the anxieties of the Self. Zolf uses multiple voices and characters, unusual typography and page design, and quotations to communicate these tensions in surprising ways. *Masque* has links to innovative Canadian and Québécois writing by bp Nichol, Nicole Brossard, Gail Scott and Margaret Chrystakos, but Zolf's voice is clear and distinct.

And finally, I was neglectful in this previous column, while discussing contemporary psychedelia, to not mention Daniel Pinchbeck's excellent *Breaking Open The Head* (www.breakingopenthehead.com). *BOTH* is a mix of pop journalism, spiritual autobiography and an indictment of the violence of contemporary capitalism. He critiques the elimination of peoples and ecosystems. Pinchbeck also documents his personal and intellectual journeys through psychedelia—he recounts experiences with ibogaine, ayahuasca and 2CB, and his take on the lives and writings of Antonin Artaud, Walter Benjamin and Terrence McKenna, amongst others. It's fun and stylish but also packs much depth. ★

Mark Connery is a child care worker and library enthusiast from Toronto. Pluggin' Away *is an ongoing column of reviews in* New Socialist.

TIME TO ORGANIZE

Branches and members of the New Socialist Group are active in a number of cities. Call for information about our activities.

VANCOUVER	Box 4955, Vancouver, V6B 4A6 vancouver@newsocialist.org
HAMILTON	hamilton@newsocialist.org
EDMONTON	(780) 451-3103, or edmonton@newsocialist.org
KINGSTON	(613) 542-8462 (Contact Toby), kingston@newsocialist.org
TORONTO	(416) 955-1581 toronto@newsocialist.org
WINNIPEG	(204) 775-0265 winnipeg@newsocialist.org
FOR ALL OTHER AREAS	nsg@newsocialist.org (416) 955-1581 Box 167 253 College St Toronto Ontario M5T 1R5 www.newsocialist.org

The NSG works with the Québec organization GAUCHE SOCIALISTE

MONTRÉAL	montreal@lagauche.com
QUÉBEC CITY	quebec@lagauche.com
and the OUTAOUAIS	hull@lagauche.com

GAUCHE SOCIALISTE
CP 52131, Succ, St-Fidele, Québec, G1L 5A4
www.lagauche.com

"Nowhere else in the Canadian state is the struggle against neoliberalism so sustained as it is in Québec at the moment." See article by David McNally pp.4-5

THE NEW SOCIALIST GROUP *is an organization of activists working to renew socialism from below as part of today's struggles. Our socialism is revolutionary and democratic, committed to working-class self-emancipation, internationalism and opposition to all forms of oppression. We reject bureaucratic and authoritarian notions of socialism and look instead to the radical tradition of socialism from below, which believes that liberation can only be achieved through the activity and mobilization of the oppressed themselves. Ideas need to be put into action. So if you like what you read, get in touch with us.*

100 Years of the IWW

We have fed you all for a thousand years
And you hail us still unfed,
Though there's never a dollar of all your wealth
But marks the workers' dead.
We have yielded our best to give you rest
And you lie on crimson wool.
Then if blood be the price of all your wealth,
Good God! We have paid it in full!

There is never a mine blown skyward now
But we're buried alive for you.
There's never a wreck drifts shoreward now
But we are its ghastly crew.
Go reckon our dead by the forges red
And the factories where we spin.
If blood be the price of your cursed wealth,
Good God! We have paid it in!

We have fed you all a thousand years
For that was our doom, you know,
From the days when you chained us in your fields
To the strike a week ago.
You have taken our lives, and our babies and wives,
And we're told it's your legal share.
But if blood be the price of your lawful wealth,
Good God! We bought it fair!

Lyrics by an Unknown Proletarian - Music by R. Von Leibich
first listed printing in the IWW's Industrial Union Bulletin, April 18, 1908

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